Rereading Women's Holocaust Testimonies Against the Grain: Gendered Narratives, Representation and Identity

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Abstract

This thesis argues for and models three new critical reading practices that enable us to garner a more profound understanding of women's published, English-language testimonies of the Holocaust. It works at the interface between history and literary studies, and uses gender, queer and feminist theory as hermeneutic tools with which to reread and analyse women's testimonies 'against the grain' of androcentric, heterosexist and normative Holocaust discourses. In so doing, I show that a shift in analytic focus allows more of historical significance to be discovered in these memoirs. I illustrate that, for many women survivors producing their accounts retrospectively, the narrativization and representation of experience is gendered, and is yoked to the post-Holocaust construction of identity. Finally, I show how women's testimonies and the public representations of self-image within them, interact with, and are shaped by, the time period in which they were produced. The significance of this study is that it informs our understanding of women's memoirs by introducing a focus on both the unspoken and the overlooked that has hitherto been lacking, and reveals the power of reading through a lens unobscured by historiographical assumptions about gender and sexuality. The findings of this thesis matter because they not only demonstrate that an interdisciplinary, gender-centric approach to both women's and men's survivor literature creates space for new insights to be gained, but because they challenge essentialist readings of women's accounts, and thus broaden our understanding of women's testimonial responses to their Holocaust experiences.

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For my dad,

with whom I only wish I could share a celebratory pint.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee / University Ethics Committee on 21/08/2018.

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 79, 006.

Name: Roseanna Ramsden

Signature:

Date: 30/12/2020

Introduction

This thesis aims, at its core, to help us gain a more profound understanding of women's published testimonies of the Holocaust, paying particular attention to gendered narratives, representation, and the construction of identity within them. It rejects established critical approaches to survivor accounts taken by much Holocaust research, opting instead for a fresh manner of critical reading; one that uses queer, gender and feminist theory as hermeneutic tools with which to reread women's memoirs 'against the grain' of androcentric, heterosexist and normative Holocaust discourses. In doing so, it seeks to reveal not only that which remains largely unacknowledged by Holocaust scholarship, to, in the words of Ingrid Lewis, disinter 'representations that challenge mainstream historical knowledge by depicting taboo topics,' but to excavate that which is implicit yet undeclared in women's memoirs, that which, to cite Bonnie Zimmerman, exists in 'the spaces between words.'[1] In its unconventional, gender-centric examination of both canonical and lesser-read women's memoirs, and the representations of the Holocaust within them, this thesis aims to nuance the manner in which we, as scholars, approach survivor literature. More than that, it seeks to demonstrate that a shift in analytic focus, a revised and non-traditional stance to critical reading, can allow for new discoveries of historical importance to be made. Using this approach, this thesis aims to shine a light on the ways in which women survivors yoke personal, post-atrocity identity, preconceived notions of gender and the horror of experiences of genocide in their written accounts. Moreover, it aims to shed light on how women's narrativizations of the Holocaust interact

[1] Ingrid Lewis, *Women in European Holocaust Films: Perpetrators, Victims and Resisters* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 10; Bonnie Zimmerman, 'What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Literary Criticism', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd edn, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, William E. Cain, Laurie Finke and others (London: Norton and Company, 2010), pp. 2331 – 2350 (p. 2339).

with, and are shaped by, the historical periods within which they were produced. This thesis takes this approach in order to deepen our understanding of the varied and multifaceted ways that women comprehend, respond to, and ultimately retell their experiences, and to further our knowledge of the role played by gender in this process.

The analysis undertaken in this thesis centres on three key research questions. I ask (1) what remains overlooked in women's Holocaust memoirs, and why is it ignored; (2) whether we can approach women's memoirs from an 'against the grain' stance, and if so, how we can achieve this; and (3) what an 'against the grain' reading of women's memoirs can reveal. Thus, the goal of this thesis is threefold. Firstly, it seeks to build on extant scholarship dedicated to women and the Holocaust, offering a gynocentric body of work that hopes to further the field's findings, increase its influence in wider Holocaust studies discourses, and fill the lacuna with regards to oppositional reading. Secondly, it attempts to examine women's accounts in all their complexity and individuality: rather than reinforcing essentialist gender stereotypes or homogenising women's voices, this thesis works to accentuate the particularities of women's responses to, and representations of, the Holocaust. Thirdly, it aims to provide gender-centred, alternative approaches to reading women's memoirs 'against the grain' of existing Holocaust scholarship; each of the three core chapters of this thesis offers an example of this approach. In so doing, it seeks to evidence that these approaches can enable us to both add to and challenge established Holocaust narratives, and ultimately glean more, and different, insights from women's memoirs than was hitherto presumed. Last but not least, I hope this work – and the new reading practices it promotes and models – will encourage other scholars to read survivor memoirs afresh. This thesis is centred upon the premise that by posing fresh questions of even well-studied historical texts we can obtain fresh answers and new insights; I hope to demonstrate this in the chapters that follow. The

present chapter is dedicated to establishing the problem that my thesis seeks to address, and providing the historiographical and intellectual contexts in which this thesis needs to be read to be wholly understood.

I. Methodology

i. Methodology and Approach

The methodological approach taken throughout this work is one centred upon interpretative critical reading and qualitative research, grounded in queer, feminist and gender theory. Comparative analyses of the writers' literary styles, linguistic choices and thematic approaches in their first-person testimonies work to shed light upon *how* and *why* they represent the Holocaust as they do. Furthermore, this thesis pays particular attention to the fact that the memoirs here studied are ones that were explicitly created for publication. As such, this analysis works to provide an insight into the particularities of testimonies that were, in Lawrence Langer's words, produced with 'literary mediation' for a public audience; it aims to examine what impact this may have had on the construction, content and style of women's accounts and the authors' retrospective establishment of self-image.[2] By focusing on published memoirs we can consider the roles played by publishers, distributors, editors and public readers on written accounts, as well as how published testimonies exist in dialogue with others of their kind.

The particular accounts examined in this thesis are ones that were published in English. Though they were all written after the end of the Second World War, their publication dates span a period of seventy-six years. They also include works authored by women of varying nationalities, religions, social classes and ages, though the primary

[2] Lawrence Langer, 'Interpreting Survivor Testimony' in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. by Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), pp. 26 - 40 (p. 32).

focus of this research are the accounts of Jewish survivors. The breadth and scope of sources here used allows not only for a comparative approach to be taken, but for the writers and their memoirs to be understood, individually and collectively, in relation to their own unique contexts. These considerations are significant for ensuring that this thesis address sensitively the factors that may have shaped individual survivor responses to their Holocaust experiences. These factors include the authors' personal backgrounds, testimonial and historiographical discourses, gender norms and expectations, time and place of publication, global Holocaust consciousness and commemoration, and wider social, political, and cultural factors. Sara R. Horowitz summarises the importance of acknowledging these details in the study of women's accounts when she notes:

> Treating women as a more or less unified group with similar behavioral characteristics ignores important differences in cultural background, social class, age, economic standing, level of education, religious observance, and political orientation – differences that, like gender, contributed to the way victims responded to their circumstances.[3]

Furthermore, the testimonies here studied are those written by women who experienced incarceration in a variety of Nazi internment centres in Nazi-occupied Europe during the Holocaust. These include concentration, forced labour and death camps, and even prison cells and bunkers, though I predominantly focus on representations of concentration camps. This is because it is to this setting that women memoirists generally dedicate most space. Particular attention is paid to depictions of life in Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II because these are the most commonly depicted concentration camps in women's accounts, followed by Ravensbrück, which is often

[3] Sara R. Horowitz, 'Memory and Testimony of Women Survivors of Nazi Genocide', in *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing*, ed. by Judith R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), pp. 258 – 282 (p. 265).

described by those who were non-Jewish political prisoners.[4] The examination of a broad range of sources here is not intended to homogenise Holocaust experiences or their retellings (attention is paid to specificity to avoid this), nor to distort the distinctions between varying Nazi institutions of oppression and murder. Rather, it is to allow for a heterogenous range of retellings to be considered. Memoirs specifically of hiding and ghettoization are generally not considered here, and the close reading of the following chapters is centred upon portrayals of life in Nazi internment centres.

It is also important to address that this thesis does not offer a comprehensive history of women's testimonies, but that the women's accounts here studied are ones written in the English original or published in English translation. This, of course, has implications for the applicability of its findings. In the first instance, it must be acknowledged that the translation of memoirs into multiple languages aids the globalisation of Holocaust memory, and that this itself, according to Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, has the potential to 'standardize and destroy' the intricacies of individual accounts.[5] In light of this, this thesis reads testimonies in translation thoughtfully, and strives to remain mindful of nuances lost in the translation process. It is also sensitive to the possibility of nuances created in the active translation process, which can (not unproblematically) add to texts much like it can take away from them. Likewise, any study of accounts both written and translated into English must be conducted with the understanding that they were published within the Anglophone world. As a consequence, the narrative to which this thesis affixes testimonies is Anglophone in nature and, to an

[4] Ravensbrück was a concentration camp located roughly 90km north of Berlin. It exclusively housed women inmates, the majority of whom were political prisoners, and all of whom were forced to do hard labour. Though the SS used prisoners from a nearby men's camp to build and operate gas chambers at Ravensbrück in 1944, relatively few prisoners were murdered in them. Most died of disease, starvation and exhaustion.

[5] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, trans. by Assenka Oksiloff (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), p. 1.

extent, universalised. Finally, this thesis also considers the translational and inherently distortive process of narrativization. Outwith linguistic translation, memoirists themselves provide a '[translation] of the events of the [Holocaust] to readers who were not there and who have no point of departure or set of experiences to which they can refer […].'[6] To use the words of Gabriele Stoicea, through retelling survivors attempt a form of translation which seeks to overcome the 'radical foreignness of all traumatic experience even to its own participants,' aiming to accurately describe indescribable events.[7]

Accordingly, this thesis, as must any study of survivor literature, remains alert to the fact that all Holocaust memoirs, both published and unpublished, are constructions of events experienced by the author, attempts to translate that which has been seen, heard, and felt, and which oftentimes defies imagination, into narrative. While memoirs are able to provide an insight into experiences as they are remembered and retold, and are able to shed light on how a survivor has shaped and organised their recollections, they cannot be interpreted as historical evidence of events. Robert Scholes sums up this point precisely in his book *Structural Fabulation*, explaining that all writing is a representation or version of an event, not a carbon copy of it: 'It is because reality cannot be recorded that realism is dead. All writing, all composition, is construction. We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only *poesis*. No recording. Only construction.'[8] This notion has featured heavily in critical literature explicitly dedicated to witness testimony of the Holocaust. Lawrence Langer, for instance, asserts that all Holocaust survivors producing their accounts after liberation 'recreate details and images

[6] Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, eds., *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 62.
[7] Gabriela Stoicea, 'The Difficulties of Verbalizing Trauma: Translation and the Economy of Loss in Claude Lanzmann's "Shoah"', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 39:2 (Fall, 2006), 43 – 53 (p. 45).
[8] Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 7.

of the event through written texts, and in so doing remind us that we are dealing with *represented* rather than unmediated reality.' He adds that:

> [M]emoir still abides (some more consciously than others) by certain literary conventions: chronology, description, characterization, dialogue, and above all, perhaps, the invention of a "narrative voice" to impose on apparently chaotic events a perceived sequence, *whether or not that sequence was perceived in an identical way* during the period that is being rescued from oblivion by memory and its companion, language.[9]

James E. Young concurs, emphasising that the value of Holocaust memoir is not its ability to document unmediated facts – for, he argues, it cannot – but its ability to illustrate how a survivor has apprehended and shaped their story. In his words:

> [T]he critical reader accepts that every Holocaust writer has a "different story" to tell, not because what happened to so many others was intrinsically "different," but because *how* victims and survivors have grasped and related their experiences comprises the actual core of "their story."[10]

Taking his point further still, Young claims that survivor literature most convincingly evidences the existence of the author and their life after the Holocaust, rather than the reality of their experiences. For ultimately, he contends, those experiences can never truly and accurately be reconstructed or represented in narrative, though the manner in which the survivor has understood them can be successfully.[11]

While, due to the failures of memory, the impact of trauma, and the distortive process of narrativization, one cannot presume that all of the claims made by survivors in their memoirs are factually accurate, I take the stance in this thesis that a survivor's narrative is reflective of the manner in which they organise, understand and retell their experiences. I remain in agreement with both Young and Langer that it is crucial to

[9] Langer, 'Interpreting Survivor Testimony', pp. 26 – 27. Italics Langer's own.
[10] James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 38 – 39. Italics Young's own.
[11] Ibid., p. 37.

approach survivor memoirs as constructions, or rather reconstructions of events; they are representations of experiences, mediated and shaped by the historical period in which they are produced. Annette Wierworka summarises this:

> Testimonies, particularly when they are produced as part of a larger cultural movement, express the discourse or discourses valued by society at the moment the witnesses tell their stories as much as they render an individual experience. In principle, testimonies demonstrate that every individual, every life, every experience of the Holocaust is irreducibly unique. But they demonstrate this uniqueness using the language of the time in which they are delivered and in response to questions and expectations motivated by political and ideological concerns. Consequently, despite their uniqueness, testimonies come to participate in a collective memory – or collective memories – that vary in their form, function, and in the implicit or explicit aims they set for themselves.[12]

Testimonies written by both male and female Holocaust survivors cannot be separated from the discursive frameworks within which they are written and by which they are informed. For many women writing after the Holocaust, and particularly those writing in the 1970s and afterwards, these informative discourses include the extant literary canon of Holocaust memoir. To cite Camilla Loew:

> contemporary memory of the Holocaust is marked by previous representations and cannot be decontextualized from the existence of this discursive frame. Any attempt to represent must necessarily be inscribed in this canon, a tradition over half a century in the making.[13]

Thoughtfulness about context and the constructed nature of Holocaust testimonies is central, and of paramount importance to, the approach to literature taken in this thesis. It maintains that survivor testimonies are useful not necessarily, or only, in understanding the lived experiences of the author, but in comprehending the way that author has remembered, understood and narrativized those experiences retrospectively.

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[12] Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. by Jared Stark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. xii.
[13] Camilla Loew, *The Memory of Pain: Women's Testimonies of the Holocaust* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), p. 123.

Lastly, it is important to both emphasise and acknowledge that the accounts of the Holocaust to which we have access, and thus the memoirs here studied, represent only a minute portion of voices from the Holocaust, for survival among victims, and particularly Jewish victims, was the exception and not the rule. Moreover, published accounts of the Holocaust were created by particularly literate authors who were able, either with the help of a writer or alone, to produce a coherent written narrative of their experiences. Thus, the version of the Holocaust that we are able to garner from published memoirs is one that is, to some extent, dictated by class and a degree of privilege. Even many accounts that have been published, such as those written in Yiddish or those by women generally, have remained in the margins of history and even today are not widely read. As such, survivor memoirs cannot and should not be taken as representative of all Holocaust experiences or their retellings.

ii. Theoretical Frameworks

Given the reliance of this thesis upon gender, feminist and queer theory in its critical reading, it is vital to establish how they are used in and inform this study. This thesis understands gender to be a cultural and societal construction, a structure of differences between men and women that are culturally rather than biologically or inherently determined. It follows Judith Butler's feminist stance that 'gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex,' and eschews essentialist and biologist cultural feminism and dichotomous thinking.[1] The analysis offered here works, in a manner akin to the thinking of Pascale Rachel Bos, on the assumption that – and to ultimately understand how – gender ideals and norms

[1] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 8.

impact the way individuals remember and recount their Holocaust stories.[2] Finally, I concur with Sarah Imhoff's assertion in *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*, that '[g]ender norms […] have two aspects: on one hand, they are ideals or aspirations, and on the other they are what is assumed to be normal.'[3] This thesis is guided by the premise that gender norms are universal, powerful, and oppressive, and shape individuals' expectations, lived experiences and understandings.

Developing since the 1970s into now mature fields of scholarship in their own right, the insights of women's studies and gender studies have led many historians to accept that gender is critical to the comprehension of human experience.[4] While this thesis too works from this perspective and maintains that gender is a valuable and crucial category of historical analysis, it aims to avoid the traps into which much valuable yet limited women's history, or "her-story," has previously fallen. Joan Wallach Scott describes these pitfalls – commonplace, as will be seen later in this chapter, in much scholarship on women and the Holocaust – as the conflation of 'the valuation of women's experience (considering it worthy of study) and the positive assessment of everything women said or did,' and the assumption that 'gender explains the different histories of women and men' without theorisation about '*how* gender operates historically.'[5]

This thesis does not use the terms 'gender' and 'women' interchangeably, and it does not, by predominantly focusing upon the narratives of women, intend to deploy a separatist approach or idealise certain performances of gender. Rather, it works to sensitively address the diversity of women's representations of the Holocaust,

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[2] Pascale Rachel Bos, 'Women and the Holocaust: Analyzing Gender Difference', in *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust*, ed. by Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), pp. 23 - 50 (p. 36).
[3] Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), p. 7.
[4] Zoë Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust: A Feminist History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 7.
[5] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 30th Anniversary edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 20 – 22. Italics my own.

approaching women not as a monolithic category, but as a multifarious and complex group with a variety of means of retelling their stories. The analyses here conducted do not seek to replicate dichotomous discourses or buttress assumptions about gender, nor to examine how men's and women's experiences of the Holocaust were comparable or distinct, but to understand the role played by gender in the *retelling* of women's experiences.

It is worth noting that this approach could also be applied to, and deepen our understanding of, men's experiences and narrativizations *as* men. Research on men *qua* men in the Holocaust, that is, research which uses gender-centric and critical men's studies approaches to examine their testimonies, remains underdeveloped (as will be seen later in this chapter). Yet the gendered study of men's accounts is a revealing area of scholarship that demands further scrutiny, and one that can challenge normative and reductive historiographical assumptions. This thesis, however, while remaining sensitive to men's experiences and accounts, chooses to focus solely on the gendered narratives of women survivors due to its examination of the impact of normative standards of femininity on their testimonies. While this thesis is not a comparative study, the memoirs of men have been used occasionally throughout as points of comparison that serve to further underscore the specifically gendered nature of women's accounts.

Moreover, this thesis shares the understanding that, to refer again to Butler, 'any feminist theory,' or in the context of this research, any feminist study 'that restricts the meaning of gender in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism, often with homophobic consequences,' and thus, is both antifeminist and heterosexist.[6] For ultimately, heterosexism inevitably lies at the heart of what Butler terms 'sexual difference fundamentalism,' or biologist cultural feminism that

[6] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. viii.

presupposes and praises fundamental essences in women.[7] This is not to suggest that gender and sexuality are innately linked or derived from one another. Instead, it is to say that both feminist and more traditional historical scholarship should be wary of 'pervasive heterosexist assumption,' and should 'be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion.'[8]

The approach this thesis takes to sexuality – and specifically that used in Chapter 3 – is centred upon the premise that, to cite Gale Rubin, 'modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of value. Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top of the erotic pyramid.'[9] This has created heterosexism, a set of 'values and structures that assumes heterosexuality to be the only natural form of sexual and emotional expression.'[10] These assumptions abound in historical studies and even in much feminist scholarship and literary criticism. As well as employing, in the words of Elly Bulkin, a 'critical consciousness about heterosexist assumptions' in mainstream Holocaust research, this thesis works to uncover what those presuppositions may have caused scholars to overlook in women's memoirs, and how they have informed the way women write of queer sexualities in their Holocaust memoirs.[11] It builds on the pioneering work on sexuality in the Holocaust by Claudia Schoppmann, Günter Grau and Cathy S. Gelbin, in order to, in Schoppmann's words, realise 'an unobstructed view' of different survivor representations and understandings of sexuality.[12]

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[7] Ibid., p. ix.
[8] Ibid., viii.
[9] Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', in *The Norton Anthology*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch at al, pp. 2377 – 2402 (p. 2388).
[10] Zimmerman, 'What Has Never Been', in *The Norton Anthology*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch et al, p. 2332.
[11] Elly Bulkin, '"Kissing/Against the Light": A Look at Lesbian Poetry', *The Radical Teacher*, 10 (Dec., 1978), 7 – 17 (p. 8).
[12] Claudia Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians during the Third Reich*, trans. by Allison Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 27.

iii. Terminology

Finally, it is critical, before proceeding, to define and explain some of the key terms used throughout this thesis. I use the term 'Holocaust' as opposed to 'Shoah,' for instance, or other referents, because it is denotative of the persecution and mass murder of Europe's Jewry under Nazism, as well as that of other victims such as Sinti and Roma gypsies, homosexuals, and political opponents of Nazism, between 1939 and 1945. In this study, 'Holocaust' is used both because of its acknowledgement that the event was ultimately an explicit attempt to murder Europe's Jewish community in its entirety, and because of the broadness of its definition, particularly as the memoirs here examined were written by both Jewish and non-Jewish survivors. The use of this term is not an attempt to minimise the suffering of Jews during the event or to obscure the specific experiences of the Holocaust's victims; rather, it is used to encompass the diversity of voices examined in this study. For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'Holocaust' therefore refers to the targeted oppression, persecution, and murder of specific victim groups – predominantly, in this study, Jews, but also political opponents and others – in Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe between 1939 and 1945.

'Memoir' is used to refer to the published, first-person narratives of Holocaust survivors which document their authors' lives during the event, and specifically in Nazi internment centres such as concentration, death, and forced labour camps in Nazi-occupied Europe, as well as the writers' pre- and post-war lives. I use this term because of its definition as a historical account or biography written from personal knowledge. Moreover, the term originates from the French *mémoire*, or memory. It is, therefore, a term that acknowledges the role played by memory, and indeed, memory failures, in the

construction of historical accounts, and particularly in those written decades after the Holocaust itself. Yet, Dennis B. Klein contends that:

> "Memoirs" is a more common designation for the genre that is associated with survivors, but that term, in addition to suggesting a backward-looking enterprise that only partly represents survivors' narratives, conveys the sense of a finished retrospection when, on the contrary, survivors feel the past is never past.[13]

It is for this reason that I, like Klein, also use the terms 'testimony,' 'narrative' and 'account' to refer to the same texts. The Holocaust's continuing impact on survivors and the process of organising experience into narrative are of particular importance to this thesis, which is largely concerned with the post-Holocaust construction of identity undertaken during the testimony writing process. To use the term 'memoir' alone, I feel, would be to understate the significance of the on-going process of writing and remembering to this research. Furthermore, the term 'survivor,' or 'Holocaust survivor,' is used in this thesis to describe those, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who suffered persecution under Nazism, and experienced first-hand the terror of incarceration in a prison or Nazi institution, or any person who feared or experienced oppression, and lived through it. To cite Klein once again, this study defines surviving as 'outliving life-threatening and hopelessly degrading experiences' during the Holocaust.[14]

II. Historiography

i. Testimony Ignored

My initial scholarly introduction to published Holocaust narratives came some years ago during my time as an undergraduate student of English literature. One of the modules I

[13] Dennis B. Klein, *Survivor Transitional Narratives of Nazi-Era Destruction: The Second Liberation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 24.
[14] Ibid., p. 23.

had chosen, and in fact, was most looking forward to studying, addressed the subject of Holocaust testimony in literature and visual culture. The reading list for the ten-week course, which included Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*, Primo Levi's canonical testimony *If This is a Man*, and Claude Lanzmann's documentary film *Shoah*, at first appeared diverse and wide-ranging. Texts produced by survivors, the children of survivors, authors and scholars had been incorporated into the module, and it also covered film, documentary, fiction and testimony. Yet, during the latter half of the course, while studying Charlotte Delbo's memoir *Auschwitz and After*, the absence of women memoirists and writers on the carefully selected module reading list became glaringly apparent. This gap in the course literature, and certainly, in my own knowledge of Holocaust writing, troubled me. It led me to consider the question, 'How did women experience and write about the Holocaust?' In the years that have followed, this question has remained with me, and has become the motivation for my research.

I soon discovered that many feminist scholars and historians have been posing – and trying to answer – this question since the late 1970s.[15] Even before then, since the years immediately following the end of the Second World War, Holocaust historiography has struggled not only to provide a discourse which adequately deals with the testimonies of women, but with those of individual survivors; a large proportion of earlier Holocaust research is dominated by an emphasis on perpetrator behaviour. This pattern can be attributed to the fact that historians, equipped with a 'technical language' better suited to the analysis of historical documentation, lacked adequate means to sufficiently examine survivor accounts written from a personal perspective.[16] In the words of Tom Lawson,

[15] Joan Ringelheim carried out her first interviews with women survivors of the Holocaust in 1979. See Joan Ringelheim, 'The Split Between Gender and the Holocaust', in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 340 – 350 (p. 341).
[16] Hayden White, 'Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth', in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, ed. by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 37 – 53 (p. 37).

'social sciences in general and historians in particular lacked a vocabulary and indeed a methodology for dealing with ordinary people and their experiences.'[17] Thus, he observes, 'there is no doubt that [victims'] stories, somewhat perversely, found no place in historians' attempts to explain and contextualise *their* suffering.'[18]

More than that, historians have often been concerned about the unreliability of witness memory, and have therefore been reluctant to work with survivor accounts. Peter Novick, for example, suggests in *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* that witness testimonies should be treated with mistrust, arguing that survivors' memories are 'not a very useful historical source' because of their inability to provide unmediated fact.[19] Gerald Reitlinger concurs, going as far as to deem testimonies an unworthy source because their authors were often poorly educated.[20] This led Tony Kushner to rightly assert that 'the early histories of the "Final Solution" explicitly ignored and downplayed victim testimony.'[21] Since the 1980s, however, perpetrator domination of Holocaust historiography has been challenged by a number of historians, including Martin Gilbert, Saul Friedländer, Annette Wieviorka, and Christopher Browning. They have worked to 'deal with testimony *en masse*,' using material gathered from a 'variety of witnesses and taken at different times since 1945' to underpin their histories of the Holocaust.[22]

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[17] Tom Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 271 - 273.
[18] Ibid., p. 273. Italics Lawson's own.
[19] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 275.
[20] Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe, 1939 – 1945* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1953), p. 531.
[21] Tony Kushner, 'Saul Friedländer, Holocaust Historiography and the Use of Testimony' in *Years of Persecution, Years of Extermination: Saul Friedländer and the Future of Holocaust Studies*, ed. by Christian Wiese and Paul Betts (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 67 – 80 (p. 67).
[22] Ibid.

ii. The Androcentrism of Holocaust Discourses

Is it the case, however, that all victim testimonies have been equally peripheral in Holocaust studies? Or are women's memoirs more marginalised than men's? Feminist historians are resounding in their answer: Holocaust scholarship is, and indeed always has been, male-centred, and women's voices have been pushed to the margins. As a result, and as was observed by Carol Rittner and John K. Roth in 1993, 'relatively little attention has been paid to women's experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust […] Thus the particularities of women's experiences and reflections have been submerged and ignored.'[23]

Some unitary histories of the Holocaust, such as David Cesarani's *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933 – 49*, Christian Gerlach's *The Extermination of the European Jews* and Doris L. Bergen's *The Holocaust: A Concise History*, lend limited space to the specific issues that impacted the lives of women during the Holocaust, among them sexual violence, pregnancy, and 'the violation of domestic space' during Nazi pogroms, and also make use of women's memoirs and oral histories.[24] Yet, references to women in these monographs often come alongside references to the shared fate of their male counterparts. Of course, while it is crucial to consider that Jewish men and women were fated to share the same end under Nazi rule, this should not mean overlooking the distinct histories of men and women altogether. Bergen goes as far as to suggest that Nazi 'violence and destruction rendered obsolete distinctions of age, sex, class, and national origin among

[23] Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), p. xi. Countless feminist historians echo Rittner and Roth's sentiments, agreeing that women's voices from and experiences of the Holocaust have been overlooked in scholarship. See, for example: Elizabeth Roberts Baer and Myrna Goldenberg, eds., *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), p. xvii; Myrna Goldenberg and Amy H. Shapiro, eds., *Different Horrors, Same Hell: Gender and the Holocaust* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), p. 3; Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust*; Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
[24] David Cesarani, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-49* (London: Pan Books, 2017), p. 186.

Jews, all of whom were slated for destruction.'[25] Yet Nazi violence did not render distinctions obsolete in terms of victim experience. Bergen also fails to recognise Nazi prejudices against Jewish women as a specific – or a specifically intersectional – category of prejudice in its own right.

Furthermore, even many of the most influential studies of survivor experiences have been androcentric. Irving Halperin's seminal 1970 monograph, *Messengers from the Dead: Literature of the Holocaust*, for example, one of the first studies to concentrate explicitly on survivors, centres its analysis on the narratives of male Jewish survivors Italian chemist Primo Levi and Romanian writer Elie Wiesel, among others. Even Saul Friedländer, who claims that survivor 'voices are essential if we are to attain an understanding of this past' because 'it is their voices that conveyed both the clarity of insight and the total blindness of human beings confronted with an entirely new and utterly horrifying reality,' favours the voices of male survivors in *The Years of Extermination*.[26] While much attention is paid in this monograph to diarists such as Chaim Kaplan, Emmanuel Ringelblum, Victor Klemperer, and Dawid Sierakowiak, references to women survivors serve only to highlight their shared fate with men, children, and the elderly. Studies such as this, those that have amplified the voices of men while relegating women's stories and their particularities to footnotes of history, have reinforced a narrative that treats men's experiences of the Holocaust as normative, and that presupposes that women and men share the same history of the Holocaust.

Though in recent years Holocaust scholarship has become much more diverse, traditionally its research has considered men's experiences and writing as representative. This is not to suggest that male historians only write about what they 'know' or about

[25] Doris L. Bergen, *The Holocaust: A Concise History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), pp. 8 – 9.
[26] Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939 – 1945* (London: HarperCollins, 2007), p. 2.

aspects of history that resonate with them personally. Rather, it is to contend that male-dominated scholarship often, perhaps unwittingly, neglects to consider the perspectives of women, and the unique contextual and gendered factors that shape their respective accounts. As S. Lillian Kremer puts it, '[b]ecause chroniclers of Jewish history, like most historians, privilege male experience as normative, women have routinely been cast at the margins of Jewish history.'[27] Even in the 1980s and 1990s, as historiography on women and the Holocaust increasingly began to emerge, the mainstream of Holocaust scholarship vocalised its resistance to the gendered study of the event. Lawrence Langer, for instance, expressed concerns that differentiating victims of the Holocaust in any way is dangerous, and risks placing responsibility for survival on victims themselves. Observing differences between the experiences of men and women, he contends, has the potential to devalue the suffering and loss which ties all victims of the Holocaust together. In his essay, he is particularly scathing:

> [I]t seems to me that nothing could be crueler or more callous than the attempt to dredge up from this landscape of universal destruction a mythology of comparative endurance that awards favor to one group of individuals over another […] All efforts to find a rule of hierarchy in that darkness, whether based on gender or will, spirit or hope, reflect only our own need to plant a life-sustaining seed in the barren soil that conceals the remnants of two-thirds of European Jewry. The sooner we abandon this design, the quicker we will learn to face such chaos with unshielded eyes.[28]

Yet, while Langer's concerns about favour awarded to different victim groups and a 'rule of hierarchy' are warranted, he overlooks – and misunderstands – altogether the advancements in knowledge to be gained from the thoughtful study of gendered, and particularly women's, experiences and representations of the Holocaust.

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[27] S. Lillian Kremer, *Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p. 1.
[28] Lawrence L. Langer, 'Gendered Suffering? Women in Holocaust Testimonies', in *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), ed. by Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, pp. 351 – 363 (p. 362).

Others too objected.[29] Describing how the 'zealous and accusatory' gaze of women's studies had fallen upon Holocaust studies, Gabriel Schoenfeld obdurately criticised feminist scholars for, as he claims, using 'the Holocaust as a means of validating their feminist theory,' and attempting to provide an unnecessary 'feminist re-education' of the Holocaust.[30] He goes as far as to argue that feminist Holocaust scholarship serves only to separate Jewish women from the wider Jewish community, and is blind in its 'zeal to target the male sex,' Jewish and otherwise.[31] In the case of both Langer and Schoenfeld, real concern about respecting the victims of the Holocaust is interwoven with the impulse to dismiss all that does not accord with male experience as normative. This hostility, though much reduced since its fierce beginnings in the 1990s, has not entirely dissipated even today. Despite the extensive and insightful research carried out by scholars of women and the Holocaust, its impact on Holocaust historiography as a whole remains minimal.

Perhaps surprisingly, even some women survivors have been harsh critics of the gendered study of the Holocaust. While some have argued that to create divisions between victims may divert attention from genocidal Nazi policies and the suffering of Jewish victims, others have been concerned that a focus on gender could trivialise the Holocaust. Survivors Cynthia Ozick and Helen Fagin expressed worries that an emphasis on women's experiences may reduce the Holocaust to 'an example of sexism,' or may shift focus from the fact that, as Ozick put it in a letter, "the Holocaust happened to victims

[29] Yehuda Bauer expressed similar concerns about placing the responsibility for survival on victims. He also recognised the importance of gender as a category of analysis with which to approach the Holocaust, though he did not pursue this himself particularly. See Yehuda Bauer, cited in Adrienne Kertzer, *My Mother's Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust* (New York: Broadview Press, 2002), p. 79. He does, however, concede the usefulness of a careful, gendered analysis of the Holocaust. See Yehuda Bauer, cited in Baer and Goldenberg, eds., *Experience and* Expression, p. xxvii.
[30] Gabriel Schoenfeld, 'Auschwitz and the Professors,' *Commentary*, 1st June 1998, 42 – 46 (p. 44).
[31] Ibid., pp. 44 – 46.

who were not seen as men, women, or children, but as *Jews*."[32] Ozick failed to notice that her stance, concerned that a study of women risked the erasure of Jewish victims from Holocaust history, itself erased large numbers of the genocide's non-Jewish victims. Other survivors, such as Ruth Bondy, voiced concerns that '[a]ny division of the Holocaust and its sufferers according to gender seemed offensive […].'[33] Facing opposition from both within and without, it is unsurprising that Holocaust studies has historically been unreceptive to a focus on women's voices of the event, or even to using gender as a category of analysis with which to conduct its research. Not only has this resulted in the marginalisation of women's accounts, but a persistent scholarly failure to examine men's experiences *as* men, a failure to acknowledge that both men's and women's accounts are gendered. Björn Krondorfer terms this 'normativity-induced invisibility' of men as men in studies of the Holocaust 'the *non-absence*.'[34] He uses the term to refer to the fact that 'male agency and the male body […] are always *in* our sources and texts about or from men, but they are *not present* as a consciously gendered experience.'[35]

iii. Women and the Holocaust: A Shift in Historical Focus

The late 1970s saw the birth of scholarship on women and the Holocaust that would go on to incite this hostile pushback, as a wave of feminist historians, inspired by the

[32] Rittner and Roth, eds., *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, p. 4; Cynthia Ozick, quoted in Joan Ringelheim, 'The Split Between Gender and the Holocaust,' in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Ofer and Weitzman, pp. 340 – 350 (p. 349). Italics Ozick's own.
[33] Ruth Bondy, 'Women in Theresienstadt and the Family Camp in Birkenau', in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Ofer and Weitzman, pp. 310 - 326 (p. 310).
[34] Björn Krondorfer, 'Hiding in Plain View: Bringing Critical Men's Studies and Holocaust Studies into Conversation', in *The Holocaust and Masculinities: Critical Inquiries into the Presence and Absence of Men*, ed. by Björn Krondorfer and Ovidiu Creangâ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020), pp. 17 – 52 (p. 31). Italics Krondorfer's own.
[35] Ibid. Italics Krondorfer's own.

development of women's studies in the early 1970s in the USA, pioneered the rejection of androcentric research and stressed the important insights to be gained from using gender as a tool for historical analysis.[36] Doyenne of women and the Holocaust, Joan Ringelheim, signalled this shift, and was the recipient of Cynthia Ozick's abovementioned letter following her co-organisation of a conference dedicated to the topic. Notwithstanding the opposition, and Ozick's claim that Ringelheim risked 'eradicating Jews from history' by transforming the Holocaust into an event centred upon feminism, Ringelheim persisted.[37] She carried out the conference, entitled 'Women Surviving the Holocaust,' at Stern College, New York, in 1983, and went on to produce ground-breaking scholarship on women's Holocaust experiences and their marginalisation.

In her 1984 article, 'The Unethical and the Unspeakable: Women and the Holocaust,' Ringelheim called for a reconsideration of 'gender-neutral' approaches to the Holocaust.[38] Later, in 1985, a somewhat self-critical article entitled, 'Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research,' saw Ringelheim clarify that differences between survivors should not be used to legitimise the survival of particular victim groups. Anticipating the concerns of Lawrence Langer, she describes the practice of uncovering differences between women and men in the Holocaust as 'pernicious because it helps us […] move toward acceptance or valorisation of oppression.'[39] In this article, Ringelheim nuanced her own stance and flagged some of the potential pitfalls of scholarship dedicated to women and the Holocaust, issuing a warning to other historians

[36] See Joan Kelly Gadol, 'The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History', *Signs*, 1.4 (1976), 809 – 823 (p. 812).
[37] Ozick, quoted in Ringelheim, 'The Split Between', in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Ofer and Weitzman, p. 348.
[38] Joan Ringelheim, 'The Unethical and the Unspeakable: Women and the Holocaust', *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual*, 1 (1984), 69 – 87 (p. 69).
[39] Joan Ringelheim, 'Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research', in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, ed. by Rittner and Roth, pp. 373 – 418 (p. 387).

in the nascent field. More than that, she paved the way for generations of future scholars to ground their gynocentric research in considerations of the nature of oppression, liberation, survival, resistance, and obligation. Ringelheim's work marked a watershed in the scholarly study of the Holocaust. She set in motion the production of a wealth of scholarship centred predominantly upon the experiences and perspectives of Jewish women. Even today, however, there is a dearth of scholarship on the experiences of non-Jewish women, among them Roma, Sinti and queer women.

Sybil Milton was likewise important in the field, bemoaning an 'incomplete' and at times, 'biased and misleading' historiography of the Holocaust that neglected women's perspectives; she offered a (somewhat contentious) corrective to this with her 1984 essay, 'Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women.'[40] While Milton used this essay to rightly challenge an incomplete and androcentric historiography of the Holocaust, her argument that women were, in some cases, better at surviving the Holocaust than their male counterparts, despite the often worse conditions in which they lived, proved the basis – and justification – for Ringelheim's concerns. In asserting that women possess fundamental qualities – among them resilience, the tendency to bond and share with one another, and an adeptness for language learning and housework – that ultimately helped them to survive more successfully than Jewish men, Milton not only reinforced flawed dualisms and gender essentialism, but to use Ringelheim's words, valorised oppression. This reductive stance did not advance our understanding of the Holocaust. It risked, in fact, implying that responsibility for survival – or lack thereof – lay with the Holocaust's victims, and was rooted in their ability to conform to notions of acceptable gendered behaviour.

[40] Sybil Milton, 'Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women' in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, ed. by Rittner and Roth, pp. 213 - 249 (p. 214).

Much well-intentioned yet (at times) misguided scholarship followed, as historians began to answer the calls of Ringelheim and Milton in the late 1980s and early 1990s to bring women's voices into Holocaust discourses. This research provided some valuable insights into the experiences of Jewish women. Yet its approach, informed by cultural feminism, often served to reduce women survivors to gender stereotypes, and largely failed to interrogate both the role played by gender in the experience of victims, and how the Holocaust impacted gender. This can be seen in some of the essays in Carol Ritter and John K. Roth's influential edited collection, *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*. The first collection of its kind on the topic, Rittner and Roth's anthology aimed to illustrate that 'emphasis on what happened to women reveals what otherwise would remain hidden: a fuller picture of the unprecedented and unrelenting killing that the "Final Solution's" anti-Semitism and racism entailed.'[41] By combining the voices of Holocaust scholars, survivors and historians alike, the authors hoped that a more thorough and representative understanding of the Holocaust could be realised. Though it includes Ringelheim's 1985 article, however, many of the essays within the anthology focus predominantly upon women's biology, motherhood, and their traditional roles as housewives and carers.

Gisella Bock's chapter, 'Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,' for instance, originally published in 1983, considers how sexism and racism intersected under National Socialism. Bock argues that 'prohibition of abortion and compulsory sterilization, compulsory motherhood and prohibition of motherhood – far from contradicting each other – had now become two sides of a coherent policy combining sexism and racism.'[42] The potential to bear children,

[41] Rittner and Roth, eds., *Different Voices*, p. 4.
[42] Gisela Bock, 'Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State', in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, ed. by Rittner and Roth, pp. 161 – 186 (p. 168).

she contends, meant that Jewish women during the Holocaust experienced a 'double oppression,' in which the Nazis' sexist and racist policies targeted women on ethnic and gender grounds, specifically because they were women and Jews.[43] She is careful to stipulate, however, that similarities between the experiences of Jewish men and women, rather than differences, should be a cornerstone of Holocaust research. Marion A. Kaplan's 1990 article, 'Jewish Women in Nazi Germany: Daily Life, Daily Struggles, 1933-1939,' also featured in the collection, is comparable. Focusing on 'housewives and mothers' and their 'gender specific experiences' of the Holocaust, Kaplan's essay is premised on the theory that women's pre-war roles – housewife, mother – aided their emigration efforts, their supportive social networks, and their childcare. She identifies the 'triple burden' – 'employment and housework,' and 'escalating emotional caretaking' – that specifically confronted women in the Holocaust as their responsibilities increased.[44] As such, and though this research certainly helped to identify women's unique experiences, it had a tendency to presuppose fundamental – and useful – characteristics in Jewish women not evident in their male counterparts.

Another comparable, key publication focused on traditional women's roles during the Holocaust is Brana Gurewitsch's 1998 book, *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust*. In the preface of this edited anthology of oral testimonies from Jewish and non-Jewish women, Gurewitsch states that the featured survivors 'supported each other like sisters and nurtured each other like mothers,' and that '[t]o a certain extent, women's Holocaust experiences were determined by their gender and their roles in families.'[45] Not only does Gurewitsch assume, and

[43] Ibid., p. 164.
[44] Marion A. Kaplan, 'Jewish Women in Nazi Germany: Daily Life, Daily Struggles, 1933 – 1939', in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, ed. by Rittner and Roth, pp. 187 – 212 (p. 189); Ibid., p. 207.
[45] Brana Gurewitsch, ed., *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), p. xiv.

glorify, traditionally feminine qualities in the survivors she interviews, but she entirely neglects to interview those who did not claim to have acted as carers and nurturers. Even scholars who claimed wariness of such a reductive approach repeatedly returned to the recurring trope of women as caretakers. In a 1996 article, for example, Myrna Goldenberg asserts that 'friendships, bonding, nurturance, and other permutations of caring can hardly be said to be genetic and exclusive characteristics of women. Yet, in regard to the Holocaust, we read women's narrative after women's narrative that focuses on such bonding.'[46] She further points out, in a demonstration of the selectivity of her reading, that 'virtually all memoirs by women implicitly or explicitly credit survival to some manner of women's friendships and collaboration,' and that the 'the capacity for […] nurturing gave women a mental or emotional advantage' and 'contributed to their survival.'[47] Though, as will be seen in the following chapter, women's memoirs published in the 1970s and onwards, under the influence of historiography and other survivor literature, increasingly began to focus on women's supportive relationships, Goldenberg's assumption is remiss; it fails to take into consideration countless women's testimonies, particularly of the 1940s and 1950s, that do not credit women's cooperation in camps with survival. Her argument also neglects to scrutinise *why* women may emphasis mutual aid in their accounts, or place different or greater significance upon it than their male counterparts.

Likewise, in her 1998 comparative study of various survivor memoirs, Mary Lagerwey concentrates upon 'women's unique experiences, of sexuality, friendship and parenting, their mutual concern for and assistance of each other, their emotional capacity, their unselfish and sacrificial sharing, and great flexibility,' while in her treatment of

[46] Myrna Goldenberg, 'Lessons Learned from Gentle Heroism: Women's Holocaust Narrative', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 548: The Holocaust: Remembering for the Future (Nov., 1996), 78 – 93 (pp. 87 – 88).
[47] Ibid, p. 86, p. 88.

women's Holocaust memoirs S. Lillian Kremer emphasises testimonial evidence with a focus on 'feminine resourcefulness,' 'bonding and reciprocal support,' 'the formation and effective operation of female sustaining groups,' and the 'capacity to create substitute families after the loss of loved ones.'[48] Kremer not only centralises memoirs that attest to the phenomena she describes, but she cites survivor literature as evidence of 'gender-divergent strategies for coping and resistance,' leaving unscrutinised, much like Goldenberg, the reasons why authors of both genders may narrativize – or emphasise – their experiences differently, even if the experiences themselves were relatively comparable.[49] Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman's influential 1998 anthology, *Women in the Holocaust*, follows, in part, the same pattern. Like that of Rittner and Roth, Ofer and Weitzman's collection combines witness accounts and scholarly essays, authored by Joan Ringelheim, Marion Kaplan, Lawrence Langer, Myrna Goldenberg, and Sarah Horowitz, among others. Born from an eponymous workshop held in 1995 at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, the book seeks, above all, to demonstrate 'the importance of asking questions about what happened to women in the Holocaust, without in any way minimizing the horror of what the Nazis did to all Jews.'[50]

Some of its chapters do interrogate, in a moderately objective manner, how women experienced the Holocaust. The editors themselves warn that a restricted view of women's experiences 'marginalizes women, and, ironically, reinforces the male experience as the 'master narrative."[51] Yet some of its chapters struggle to move beyond a one-dimensional study of women's perspectives and lived experiences. For example, though in her chapter 'Memoirs of Auschwitz Survivors: The Burden of Gender,' Myrna

[48] Mary Lagerwey, *Reading Auschwitz* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1998), p. 75; Kremer, *Women's Holocaust Writing*, pp. 16 – 18.
[49] Kremer, *Women's Holocaust Writing*, p. 8.
[50] Ofer and Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust*, p. 16.
[51] Ibid.

Goldenberg demands that 'to represent the Holocaust more fully, we must […] examine the memoirs of women,' she concentrates on memoirs that:

> emphasize women's strong concern for one another as well as their dependency on one another to withstand the barbarism of the camps; their adaptation of homemaking skills into coping skills; and the effects of their heightened physical vulnerability and fear of rape.[52]

Even Felicja Karray, who stipulates in her chapter that 'women expressed contrasting opinions' on the availability of women's mutual aid in concentration camps, – some claimed that 'human interaction in the camps descended to the level of utter bestiality' while others documented 'friendships and willingness to help' – returns to the notion that, on the whole, 'women inmates developed closer relationships and devised new ways to help each other.'[53] These chapters and articles interrogate how societal constructions of gender and women's biology both shaped and dictated women's experiences during the Holocaust, and for this they must be credited. Their insights, among others, opened up a field of study that is still being pursued today. Yet, many of these studies approach their sources with expectations about gender that, rather than highlight the diverse experiences and complex narratives of women survivors, standardise their behaviours as typically feminine. More than that, and in Zoë Waxman's words, '[w]hat is often overlooked is the importance of gender difference in the *narration* of experience.'[54]

There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Valuable essays included in *Women in the Holocaust* by Joan Ringelheim, Sara Horowitz, and Dalia Ofer herself, examine the nature of gendered suffering and gendered recall, and even seek to highlight women's

[52] Myrna Goldenberg, 'Memoirs of Auschwitz Survivors: The Burden of Gender', in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Ofer and Weitzman, pp. 327 – 339, (p. 327).
[53] Felicja Karay, 'Women in the Forced-Labor Camps', in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Ofer and Weitzman, pp.285 – 309 (pp. 294 – 295).
[54] Zoë Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 128. Italics Waxman's own.

varying responses that often saw them 'set aside convention' altogether.[55] Ringelheim and Horowitz's essays are particularly important, and signalled the way for the more nuanced gendered study of women the Holocaust.[56] Similarly, in her 1986 monograph, *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the Holocaust*, Marlene Heinemann dedicates a chapter to the true complexities of women's representations of concentration camp life, pointing out that in women's memoirs '[g]eneral statements about helping and comradeship stand side by side with assertions that the Nazi system set people against each other and that selfish responses were the norm.'[57] Far from reading women's testimonies selectively in order to reinforce gender assumptions, Heinemann strives, through a thorough and open-minded examination of survivor accounts, to illustrate that women did not always conform to normative gender roles, nor did they always exclude documentation of gender non-conformism from their memoirs. Furthermore, Heinemann is able to identify that both survivor guilt and gender expectations shape the way a survivor remembers and retells their experiences.[58] Judith Tydor Baumel's 1998 book, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust*, is comparably concerned with offering a complex understanding of the Holocaust through the conceptualisation of women's gendered experiences, and provides a nuanced exploration of this topic. Extensive in scope, the study works effectively as an attempt to 'locate, explore and understand the role of women during the Holocaust.'[59]

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[55] Dalia Ofer, 'Gender Issues in Diaries and Testimonies of the Ghetto: The Case of Warsaw', in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Ofer and Weitzman, pp. 143 – 167 (p. 163).
[56] See Ringelheim, 'The Split Between Gender and Experience', in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Ofer and Weitzman, pp. 340 – 350; Horowitz, 'Women in Holocaust Literature: Engendering Trauma Memory', in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Ofer and Weitzman, pp. 364 – 377.
[57] Marlene E. Heinemann, *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the Holocaust* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 81.
[58] Ibid., pp 9 – 10.
[59] Judith Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2013), p. 3.

Despite these efforts, however, much scholarship dedicated to women and the Holocaust from this period foregrounds not only women's biology, but the stories of survivors who conformed – or claim to have conformed – to normative expectations of gender. Preferential representation was often given to women who maintain that they behaved as caregivers or nurturers, mothers or sisters, while those whose experiences and retellings diverge from traditional gender norms were largely left out of this research altogether. In short, an almost exclusive emphasis on women's solidarity and mutual assistance unwittingly suppressed alternative voices and reinforced traditional gendered narratives.

iv. A New Wave of Holocaust Scholarship

At the turn of this present century, however, feminist historians and scholars began to shift their attention away from traditional women's roles and Nazi biological policy, attempting to remedy the fact that, as Lisa Pine puts it, 'women who did not behave according to traditional female gender norms are not discussed by historians, even though some survivors mentioned such women; there has been a taboo in treating them.'[60] Building upon, and offering an alternative to, prior feminist scholarship that had homogenised women's voices, 'treating women as a more or less unified group with similar behavioural characteristics,' this new wave of research worked, in Camilla Loew's words, at 'locating a gendered Holocaust experience based mainly on the testimonies *written* by women.'[61] Central to its approach was understanding not only women's complex and distinct voices and experiences, but interrogating *how* and *why* women retell the Holocaust as they do, how expectations of gender informed the

[60] Lisa Pine, 'Gender and the Family', in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. by Dan Stone (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 364 – 382 (p. 372).
[61] Horowitz, 'Memory and Testimony' in *Women of the Word*, p. 256; Loew, *The Memory of Pain*, p. 5. Italics Loew's own.

production of their memoirs. Scholars began to embrace a more complex approach to women and the Holocaust, moving beyond 'an idealized portrait of women's behaviour […] that erases the actual experiences of women and, to an extent, domesticates the events of the Holocaust.'[62]

This began in 2003 with Elizabeth Baer and Myrna Goldenberg's interdisciplinary approach to women's narratives in their edited collection, *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust*.[63] The collection works towards 'illuminating the experiences, memories, and the expressions of Jewish and non-Jewish women in the Holocaust,' and focuses particularly on 'the social construction of women and on women's construction of their own memories and experiences through various forms of representation.'[64] Careful to echo Ringelheim's warnings, Baer and Goldenberg stipulate in the anthology's introduction that an essentialist reading of women's memoirs 'inevitably invites comparison and then judgement,' 'attributing to one gender immutable essences not found in the other.'[65] Premised, above all, on the notion that 'gender-based experience before the rise of Hitler conspicuously shaped women's responses to the Holocaust; moreover, gender-based experience influenced the way women survivors interpreted and transmitted their experiences,' the collection employs fresh methodological practices grounded in feminist theory to its readings.[66] Essays by historians such as John K. Roth, Sybil Milton, and Pascale Rachel Bos, the latter of whom interrogates how gender shaped the way women lived the Holocaust and retrospectively

[62] Horowitz, 'Memory and Testimony' in *Women of the Word*, p. 256.
[63] Myrna Goldenberg had begun to adopt a more nuanced and thoughtful stance some time before the publication of *Experience and Expression*. See Goldenberg, 'Lessons Learned', p. 87; Goldenberg, 'Narrative, and Nightmare', in *Active Voices: Women in Jewish Culture*, ed. by Maurie Sacks (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), (pp. 94 – 108), p. 105.
[64] Elizabeth Roberts Baer and Myrna Goldenberg, eds., *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2003), pp. xvi – xxx.
[65] Ibid., p. xviii.
[66] Ibid., p. xiv.

narrativized those experiences, are included in the collection, and can be credited with nuancing our approach to the gendered study of the Holocaust. As such, this thesis, dedicated not only to unconventional, gender-centric approaches to women's memoirs, but to the examination of *how* and *why* gender, among other factors, shapes those accounts, owes a great intellectual debt to Baer and Goldenberg, from whose work and reading practices it draws inspiration.

In subsequent years, a number of scholars followed Baer and Goldenberg's lead, approaching women's accounts from new gendered perspectives. In 2004 Rochelle G. Saidel's monograph, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*, was published. Made up of survivor interviews, excerpts from unpublished memoirs, and archival materials, the book seeks to 'enrich and augment' readers' understanding of the Holocaust, and particularly of women's experiences.[67] It was among the first studies to provide an in-depth history of Ravensbrück from the perspectives of its former prisoners. Shortly after came seminal scholarship by the likes of Myrna Goldenberg, Helene Sinnreich and Zoë Waxman (to whom I will shortly return), among others. Prompted by the issues raised by Joan Ringelheim in the 1980s, many of which still remained unaddressed, and inspired by the research of historians challenging the mainstream of Holocaust research in the late 1990s, these scholars began to turn their attention towards often overlooked and neglected topics, such as women's experiences of rape and sexual violence during the Holocaust. This shift in focus can in part be considered a natural consequence of increasing interest in women's Holocaust experiences; a complete study of women's lives during the Holocaust must examine the threat and reality of sexual violence which many survivors document, implicitly or explicitly, in their memoirs.

[67] Rochelle G. Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 8.

Helene Sinnreich also attributes this change in focus in the mid-2000s 'to the increase of research on rape in other areas of genocide scholarship, as well as to the recognition that genocidal conditions contribute to the likelihood that those women targeted for extermination are also likely to be raped.'[68]

Among the most influential studies is Myrna Goldenberg's essay 'Rape During the Holocaust,' which appeared in the 2007 edited collection *The Legacy of the Holocaust: Women and the Holocaust*. Shortly thereafter came Helene Sinnreich's 2008 article, '"And it was something we didn't talk about": Rape of Jewish Women during the Holocaust.' In 2010 followed Rochelle G. Saidel and Sonja M. Hedgepeth's edited collection of scholarly essays by, among others, Kirsty Chatwood, Monika Flaschka, Zoë Waxman, Helene Sinnreich and Lillian Kramer. Entitled *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, it was the first English-language book to address this topic.[69] Zoë Waxman's chapter in the collection, 'Rape and Sexual Abuse in Hiding,' asserts that a refusal to pursue gender as a line of enquiry and a persistent emphasis on heroism in Holocaust scholarship has resulted in women's stories of sexual abuse and rape while hiding going overlooked. She identifies the many reasons – a hierarchy of Holocaust suffering, shame, concern that stories of rape do not belong to the history of the Holocaust – that survivors remain silent about experiences of sexual violence. In the chapter, she argues for and utilises an approach to survivor stories that considers the unspoken in women's accounts, and that ultimately broadens our understanding of the Holocaust by acknowledging experiences that 'stand outside traditional narratives.'[70]

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[68] Helene J. Sinnreich, 'The Rape of Jewish Women during the Holocaust, in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, ed. by Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (London: University Press of New England, 2010), pp. 108 - 123 (p. 118).
[69] Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel, eds., *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust* (London: University Press of New England, 2010), p. 1.
[70] Zoë Waxman, 'Rape and Sexual Abuse in Hiding', in *Sexual Violence*, ed. by Hedgepeth and Saidel, pp. 124 – 135 (p. 129).

Certainly, Waxman has been an instrumental and key figure in developing the field of women and the Holocaust, producing innovative and influential research on testimony, memory, identity and women's experiences to which my own work is greatly indebted. Accordingly, her scholarship deserves particular attention here. Waxman's 2006 monograph, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation*, provides a history of Holocaust testimony, from those written in the ghettos and concentration camps of the Nazi-occupied territories to those produced retrospectively, some years or even decades after liberation. Focusing on the contextual factors that shaped survivor accounts, and particularly on how gender norms may have determined not only what survivors remember but how they retell their experiences, Waxman's study is a thorough and wide-reaching examination of victim responses to the Holocaust.

The book's fourth chapter, 'Writing Ignored: Reading Women's Holocaust Testimonies,' is particularly illuminating. Waxman argues that:

> Closer attention could be paid to how women's experiences are particularly structured by preconceived gender roles, and how their identities have been shaped around gendered beliefs […] [S]tudies of women in the Holocaust favour stories that are seen as suitable or palatable for their readers, often avoiding those that do not accord with expected women's behaviour or pre-existing narratives of survival.[71]

The manner in which experiences are retold, Waxman contends, is often shaped by societally constructed gender expectations to which the writers, producing texts for a public audience, can feel compelled to adhere. Thus, many – though not all – of men's and women's experiences of the Holocaust may have been more comparable than their varied narratives suggest because, 'due to expectations regarding masculinity and femininity,' women and men express themselves and remember events differently.[72] More than that, Waxman identifies that much of the distressing information included in

[71] Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, p. 124.
[72] Ibid., p. 128.

women's memoirs upsets preconceived notions of gender and is therefore overlooked by scholars; it will remain so, she claims, as long as women's experiences and retellings of the Holocaust that conform to gender expectations are valorised or 'pre-empted.'[73] Waxman further makes clear that a refusal to use gender as a category of analysis with which to approach memoirs also skews readings of canonical male testimonies, and that a Holocaust history that resists acknowledging the importance of gender to experience and its narrativization is ultimately incomplete.

It is only now, in the present, that scholars are attempting to answer Waxman's call to gender male Holocaust narratives, to explore men's experiences *as* men. The current research of Florian Zabransky at the University of Sussex on male Jewish intimacy during the Holocaust is one particularly exciting example of research being conducted in this field which, though burgeoning, is still very much in its infancy. Björn Krondorfer and Ovidio Creangâ's 2020 edited collection, *The Holocaust and Masculinities: Critical Enquiries into the Presence and Absence of Men*, which features chapters by Lisa Pine and Robert Sommer, among others, and Maddy Carey's 2017 monograph, *Jewish Masculinity in the Holocaust: Between Destruction and Construction*, also provide important insights on the Holocaust's impact on the gender identities, and gendered experiences and accounts, of men.[74]

In her 2017 monograph, *Women in the Holocaust: A Feminist History*, Waxman reiterates and strengthens her call for more research to be carried out which pursues gender as a line of enquiry, and which can shed light on the particularities of women's

[73] Lawrence Langer defines 'pre-empting' the Holocaust as 'using – and perhaps abusing – its grim details to fortify a prior commitment to an ideal of moral reality, community responsibility, or religious belief that leaves us with space to retain faith in their pristine value in a post-Holocaust world.' Lawrence Langer, *Pre-empting the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 1.
[74] See Björn Krondorfer and Ovidiu Creangâ, eds., *The Holocaust and Masculinities: Critical Inquiries into the Presence and Absence of Men* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020); Maddy Carey, *Jewish Masculinity in the Holocaust: Between Destruction and Construction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

experiences and narratives. Moreover, the book is an illuminating study of the Holocaust's impact on gender. The monograph is centred upon the premise that during the Holocaust:

> socially and culturally constructed gender roles were placed under extreme pressure; yet it is also about the fact that gender continued to operate as an important arbiter of experience. Indeed, extraordinarily enough, the extreme conditions of the Holocaust – even of the death camps – may have reinforced the importance of gender.[75]

The Holocaust constituted a concurrent attack on and reinforcement of gender roles, Waxman argues, in that though men and women were placed under comparable pressures, gender impacted their experiences, it became the difference between life and death. While, on the one hand, Nazi policy displaced both men and women and, in a sense, made all concepts of culturally constructed gender roles obsolete, it also made gender more important than ever before. In this unique and powerful argument, Waxman contends that a feminist history of the Holocaust is required in order not only to challenge the assumption that the normative male experience was the universal one, but to tackle the fact that, as she puts it, '[t]he mainstream of historical research […] has not taken on board the insights of women's or gender history, much less acknowledged the importance of insights derived from feminist theory.'[76]

III. Situating this Study and Outlining its Chapters

In the first instance, this thesis uses Waxman's observation as a point of departure, its scholarly contribution similarly motivated by the need for mainstream Holocaust research to accept and acknowledge the findings of women's history, and concede the merits of the gendered study of the Holocaust. It hopes, by producing a body of work centred upon

[75] Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust*, pp. 148 – 149.
[76] Ibid., p. 6.

women's accounts, not only to encourage traditional historical research to appreciate the valuable insights of this nascent field, but for it to accept creative yet scholarly rigorous methodological reading practices, informed by gender, feminist and queer theory, into its fold. Just as did Myrna Goldenberg, Elizabeth Baer and Zoë Waxman in the early-to-mid-2000s, this thesis hopes to contribute to an evolution of the gendered study of the Holocaust, by rereading women's accounts 'against the grain.' Like Goldenberg, Baer and Waxman, this thesis aims to diverge from earlier scholarship conducted by Gurewitsch, Kaplan and Lagerwey, among others, which had a tendency to both homogenise and romanticise women's experiences and representations of the Holocaust, instead seeking to prioritise the richness and uniqueness of individual women's accounts and explore the gendered process of narration. It works not only to disinter more of significance in women's memoirs than has hitherto been recognised, but to interrogate how normative standards of gender, the construction of identity, and other political, social and cultural factors, have shaped those memoirs. It builds on the research of scholars working contemporarily and historically in the field of women and the Holocaust in the hopes of contributing to an advanced understanding of the narrative strategies used by women to retell their experiences.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a summary of the corpus of women's published Holocaust memoirs written in – or translated into – English. It gives a chronological overview of both canonical and lesser-known published testimonies by Jewish and non-Jewish women, and examines how the different waves of women's memoir interact with the historical periods in which they were produced. This chapter also offers an overview of historiography on the different waves of women's published memoirs, and establishes the varying and specific ways scholars have characterised these texts. It highlights how assumptions about gender have informed studies of women and

the Holocaust, and identifies resultant – and persistent – historical blind spots and myths about gendered conduct and narration. In so doing, it provides historiographical and historical background knowledge for the reader, outlining some of the characterisations, myths and assumptions that will be dismantled in the chapters that follow. Above all, this chapter introduces readers to women's Holocaust memoirs and the scholarly, intellectual and contextual landscape they inhabit.

With this backdrop established in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 is a re-examination of women's retrospective memoirs of internment under Nazism. It draws attention to the representations of hostility, isolation, exclusivity and egocentrism among women prisoners within them, shifting focus from much-studied portrayals of nurturance to other themes frequently neglected by historiography. Taking into consideration contextual factors and societal expectations of gendered conduct, this chapter explores how and why women survivors portray these understudied facets of Holocaust experience, and in what ways their depiction is interconnected with the post-Holocaust construction of identity and self-image. It interrogates why, if women do indeed write about these topics – hostility, egocentrism, isolation – in their accounts, the image of women during the Holocaust as caretakers continues to endure in contemporary Holocaust scholarship and popular representations of the event. This chapter is heavily inspired by Marlene Heinemann's research on inmate relations in concentration camps, and by Waxman's scholarship on women's writing ignored, in which she diagnoses and offers a corrective to the problem that, 'using a familiar gendered conceptual framework, to put it bluntly, women's testimonies are often used to show us what we already want to see,' yet 'assumptions about appropriate gender behaviour obscure the diversity of women's Holocaust experiences' and accounts.[77] Through the use of an expanded research corpus,

[77] Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, p. 124.

different sources, and a broad collection of women's memoirs, this chapter aims to build on Waxman's work, emphasise the heterogeneity of women's testimonies, and disinter points of historical significance within women's accounts that have thus far been largely overlooked.

Chapter 3 examines how women portray queer sexuality and same-sex relationships in Nazi internment centres in their memoirs. It argues for and models a queer theory-led reading practice, demonstrating the power of a 'reading between the lines' approach. Research on sexuality and eroticism during the Holocaust is still in its infancy. As discussed above, existing scholarship on sexuality typically concentrates on rape and sexual violence, sex for survival, and sex as currency, or in contrast, an imposed absence of sexuality. The portrayal of queer sexual activity has largely been neglected. Yet this overlooked area of Holocaust research is significant because it broadens our understanding of the diverse Holocaust accounts of both men and women. This chapter explores women's representations of queer relationships in concentration camps, emphasising matters of contextuality and historicity, the retrospective construction of identity, and the maintenance of self-image. It interrogates how, and to what extent, the authors conceptualise and allude to their own sexualities, sexual identities and sexual responses to queerness through language, implication and double meaning in their published accounts. It re-examines women's portrayals of queer relationships, and aims to uncover that which heterosexist historical readings have overlooked, that which is expressed but unacknowledged by scholarship and, most importantly, that which is inferred by some memoirists but remains directly unspoken. At its simplest, this chapter exemplifies that by posing new questions of memoirs we can discover new answers; we can excavate that which has hitherto remained unseen.

Chapter 4 examines the existence of the natural world in women's retellings of internment during the Holocaust, and the function of its representation in their memoirs. The roles played by nature and non-human actors in survivor accounts of the Holocaust are, even today, largely overlooked by historians focused on anthropic and socio-political factors of survivor literature. Though attention is increasingly being paid to approaching the Holocaust from environment-oriented perspectives, scholars have been reluctant to stray far from the human aspects of the event for fear of appearing insensitive to the suffering of its victims. This area of research, however, can shed light upon how women survivors yoke personal, post-atrocity identity, preconceived notions of gender, and ecological relationships in their post-Holocaust imaginations. This chapter seeks to show that, for many women survivors life in Nazi internment centres was, at least in its retelling, characterised by turbulent relationships with non-human actors, among them lice, insects, rats, and even the weather and the natural landscape. Identifying the manner in which this is represented by survivors in their testimonies helps us recognise and acknowledge the ways they understand the dehumanisation, suffering, and oppression they experienced, as well as the role that gender plays in its retelling. It explores, through critical reading and the lens of feminist ecocritical theory, how references to the natural world, and a preoccupation with ecology, serve in women's accounts as a means of retrospective identity construction, and ultimately work to allow experiences to be retold through the lens of heroism and resistance. More than that, it aims to disinter how for women survivors narrativizing their lived ecological experiences of Nazi institutions, resistance and indeed, survival, are often portrayed as reliant upon asserting traditional feminine identity. In so doing, this chapter works to allow us, using a non-traditional critical approach and a new reading practice, to garner a deeper understanding of women's gendered accounts of incarceration.

IV. Conclusion

In her 1986 monograph Marlene Heinemann recognised that:

> The study of Holocaust literature has focussed primarily on the writings of men, whose perspectives have been taken as representative of the experience of all Holocaust victims. But to assume that Holocaust literature by men represents the writings of women is to remain blind to the findings of scholarship about the significance of gender in history and literature.[78]

In the years that followed, many feminist historians and scholars would go on to echo these sentiments, and continue to do so in the present. This thesis too hopes to strengthen that call. Research on the Holocaust and the accounts of its survivors conducted through the lens of gender can reveal much about the unique responses and narrativization processes of those who experienced it. Such scholarship can tell us not just how women survivors represent their experiences as women, but how men do as men, and how these processes are inevitably informed by gender. This thesis aims to demonstrate the power of a gendered approach to testimonies, and to contribute to the burgeoning field of women and the Holocaust and the important research conducted by its scholars. It hopes to do so not, in the words of Joan Wallach Scott, by 'recounting the great deeds performed by women,' but by exposing and examining 'the often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organisation of most societies.'[79]

To cite her once again, Wallach Scott observes that 'the point of new historical investigation is to disrupt the notion of fixity, to discover the nature of the debate or repression that leads to the appearance of timeless permanence in binary gender representation.'[80] Her observation is central to this study. This thesis aims to illustrate

[78] Heinemann, *Gender and Destiny*, pp. 2 – 3.
[79] Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 30th Anniversary edn., p. 27.
[80] Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91:5 (Dec., 1986), 1053 – 1075 (p. 1068).

that by applying fresh theoretical frameworks to survivor memoirs, by approaching them from an oppositional, 'against the grain' stance, and through sensitivity to contextuality and the nature of the gendered assumptions that have contributed to the 'appearance of timeless permanence in binary gender representation,' we stand to elicit new insights that allow a more representative understanding of the Holocaust – and both women and men's strategies of representing their Holocaust experiences – to be realised. Critical reading informed by queer theory, for example, or by gender and feminist theory as pioneered by Goldenberg and Waxman, among others, not only allows us to identify and acknowledge that which has heretofore eluded traditional Holocaust research, but that which historians may have previously lacked the tools to uncover.

In its three central chapters, this thesis hopes to help us understand women's representations of the Holocaust by shining a light on that which has gone unnoticed or only minimally studied before. It does so by modelling three modes of critical, oppositional reading, the findings of which are unique and revealing. I hope, in so doing, to prompt other early career researchers to confront Holocaust memoirs innovatively and rigorously, to seek out – and provide – new insights on historic texts. As stated in my introductory narrative, I began this thesis asking 'how did women experience and write about the Holocaust?' Throughout the course of my research this question has developed; it has grown into a curiosity about what shapes women's memoirs, about both *how* we read women's accounts, and how we could and *should* read them to most fully understand them. In the following chapters I proffer my answers.

1

Writing Summarised: A Historical Overview of Women's Holocaust Testimonies

> The story of the Holocaust can never fully be known. Too many witnesses perished. But provided we survivors continue to tell it as fully and as honestly as we can, it will not become just some blurred image in the dim and distant past.
>
> Kitty Hart-Moxon, *Return to Auschwitz*[1]

This chapter provides a summary of the corpus of women's published Holocaust memoir written in – or translated into – English. It gives a chronological overview of both canonical and lesser-known testimonies by Jewish and non-Jewish women published since 1945, many of which will be analysed in the chapters that follow. It examines how the different waves of memoir interact with the time periods in which they were produced, focusing particularly on place and date of publication and reception. This chapter also offers a more in-depth overview than that provided in the introduction of historiography dedicated to the different waves of women's testimonies, and the specific ways scholars have characterised these texts.

Writing about how Holocaust historiography has dealt with gender, and particularly about its representation of male survivors, Björn Krondorfer argues that, at times, 'scholars can fall into the trap of repeating certain gender assumptions that, over time, take on an air of facticity and unquestioned truth.'[2] In so doing, scholars have often been guilty of using survivor testimonies to uphold presumptions about gender, while

[1] Kitty Hart-Moxon, *Return to Auschwitz* (Thirsk: House of Stratus, 200), p. 228.
[2] Krondorfer, 'Hiding in Plain View', p. 25.

overlooking accounts that are not consistent with their theories. This results not only in historical blind spots, but in the creation of myths about gendered conduct and narration that lack nuance and depth. This chapter will provide examples of this selective reading phenomenon as it has been applied to women's accounts. It will summarise how, through selectivity of reading, homogenised historiographic assumptions have become ubiquitous in scholarship on women and the Holocaust, and how testimonial evidence has been used to underpin those assumptions. As such, this chapter works to establish a historiographical and historical backdrop for the reader that paves the way for the analyses of the subsequent chapters. It seeks to outline – and examine – enduring characterisations, myths and assumptions about women's accounts, some of which will be dismantled in the chapters that follow.[3] Above all, this chapter introduces readers to women's Holocaust memoirs and the scholarly, intellectual and contextual landscape they inhabit.

I. The 1940s – mid-1950s

i. Survivor Post-war Communicativeness

During the Second World War, even as the events of the Holocaust unfolded, many European Jews began to chronicle their experiences of oppression and persecution under Nazism. Diaries of time spent in Eastern European ghettos and accounts of lives lived in hiding or open hiding – 'passing' as Aryan under false papers – were produced, with many emerging publicly immediately after the war. Historian Emanuel Ringelblum and

[3] As discussed in the introduction, many of these myths have begun to be challenged in more recent studies. Yet such scholarship is, even now, struggling to puncture the established views and stereotypes created by earlier research on women and the Holocaust. It is much of this earlier scholarship to which this chapter is dedicated.

a team of Jewish writers and historians known as Oyneg Shabbos made large-scale efforts to document ghetto life during the German occupation of Poland in 1941 and 1942. The group's collection of over 6,000 documents and accounts of the Warsaw ghetto is now known as the Ringelblum Archives, and was published in book form in 2009. In the immediate post-war years, between 1945 and 1955, there was also a surge in the publication of retrospective memoirs; Jewish and non-Jewish Holocaust survivors began to produce accounts of their Holocaust experiences, some only a matter of days or weeks after liberation. These testimonies were written in Yiddish, Polish, German, English, and other European languages. Some were translated into English and other languages almost immediately, while others were translated decades later. Many, such as those written in Yiddish (and indeed those by women generally, regardless of their language of publication) have remained in the margins of history and even today are not widely read, and others have yet to be translated at all.

Some survivors, however, waited to publish their memoirs in later decades. The delayed production of testimonies for many survivors can be attributed, at least in part, to their preoccupation with recovering from trauma and rebuilding their lives immediately after the Holocaust. Many survivors also claim to have sensed a public lack of interest in survivor accounts of the Holocaust, and felt, therefore, that their stories had no audience. Polish Jewish writer, Halina Birenbaum, first published her memoir in Polish in 1967. In the preface to the 2015 English translation of her account, she explains:

> When I arrived in Israel, at the beginning of the War of Independence in 1947, everyone was struggling for his very existence […] There was no time to talk about still fresh memories. There was also no one interested in listening.[4]

[4] Halina Birenbaum, *Hope is the Last to Die: A Coming of Age under Nazi Terror*, trans. by David Welsh (London: Routledge, 2015), p. ix.

It was for these reasons, she claims, that she waited over 25 years to publish her testimony. Scholars too felt that these factors prevented many survivors from publishing their memoirs during this era. Donald Niewyk argues:

> Some survivors did not then want to talk about what they had gone through, but those who did had trouble finding a sympathetic audience. After the initial shock and outrage over the revelations of Nazi atrocities wore off in 1945, the world consciously tried to put the war behind and concentrate on reconstruction. Survivors who emigrated to the United States were urged not to dwell on the past but to start anew. Those who moved to Jewish Communities in Palestine (and, later, Israel) met with disapprobation for their tardy Zionism and for allegedly having gone "as lambs to the slaughter."[5]

Holocaust historians working in the 1990s generally agreed with Niewyk. They concurred that a global concern with Nazi war crimes and their perpetrators created an unwelcoming atmosphere for the stories of individual survivors, and thus, relatively few witness accounts emerged.

David Cesarani explains that historians largely felt that:

> the liberation of the concentration camps and the trials of Nazi leaders had attracted a flurry of attention in 1945-6, but with the focus on Western Europe and within the narrative of the war. The identity of the Jewish victims was often blurred and ignored.'[6]

Additionally, claims Cesarani, historians generally concluded that 'the Jewish communities of Israel and the Diaspora seemed reluctant to engage with the recent past.'[7] The historiographical argument was, therefore, that with little demand for their accounts, survivors produced them sparingly in the immediate post-war years. In the late 1990s and the early 2000s, historians such as Norman Finkelstein, Peter Novick, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (to whom I will return later in this chapter), among others, consolidated

[5] Niewyk, Donald L., ed., *Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives of Holocaust Survival* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 1.
[6] David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 1.
[7] Ibid.

this stance, maintaining that 'globalization' of the Holocaust at the end of the twentieth century truly brought the Holocaust into public consciousness, a landscape it had not significantly inhabited heretofore.[8] Some, such as Alison Landsberg, go as far as to suggest that in 1945 and the following years, 'as an event in its own right – the Holocaust had yet to be articulated.'[9] Thus, the notion, or indeed, the 'myth,' as Cesarani terms it, of post-war silence, was born.[10]

Yet despite this, the sheer volume of memoirs by both male and female survivors published in the immediate post-war years is remarkable. This surge in publication speaks less to a post-war silence, and more to a burst of post-war communicativeness, at least on the part of many who survived. More recently, a certain amount of revisionism has occurred, as historians have begun not only to acknowledge the number of witness testimonies produced in this period, but to question why, if the material did indeed exist, it fell under the radar of both scholarly and popular consciousness for so long. One explanation of this oversight is that large numbers of new accounts in languages such as Yiddish and Polish emerged, but remained untranslated and unpublished for some time, limiting their audiences to their respective linguistic spheres. In his chapter, 'Challenging the 'Myth of Silence': Postwar Responses to the Destruction of European Jewry' in *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*, Cesarani also proffers that a lack of translation resulted in many memoirs going overlooked by historiography:

> In almost every country in Europe from which Jews were deported, published accounts by survivors appeared within just a few years or even months after liberations or the end of the war. Until recently, histories of 'Holocaust literature' and historiographical surveys have ignored most of these, either because they did not appear in English or because they did not address the fatal peculiarity of the Jewish situation.[11]

[8] See Levy and Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*.
[9] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 114.
[10] Cesarani and Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust*, p. 2.
[11] Cesarani, 'Challenging the 'Myth of Silence': Postwar Responses to the Destruction of European Jewry', in *After the Holocaust*, ed. by Cesarani and Sundquist, pp. 15 - 38 (p. 21).

Moreover, many Jewish survivors of the Holocaust concealed their identities after liberation, changing their names or otherwise hiding their Jewishness. This meant that in the immediate post-war years memoirs by Jews emerged in greater numbers than was first assumed. Cesarani too believes that this was a contributing factor to the creation of the myth of post-war silence, citing as example the memoirs of Seweryna Szmaglewska, who hid her Jewish identity in her account, Krystyna Żywulska, who changed her name from Sonia Landau and wrote under her pseudonym, and Viktor Frankl, who hid his Jewishness in the first edition of his memoir. Above all, however, Cesarani attributes the 'myth' of post-war silence to the fact that survivor output of raw testimonial literature was so incredibly extensive in the decade after the war that 'it was almost impossible to keep up with it.'[12] Paradoxically, then, so many survivor accounts were produced and published that inevitably many were overlooked, creating 'the *illusion* that little was recorded in those years.'[13] In reality, survivor testimonies, both published and unpublished, were produced at such an overwhelming rate in the 1940s and 1950s that popular and scholarly consciousness became saturated with, and exhausted of, survivor stories.

ii. Women's Memoirs

A number of canonical (and even today, highly popular) women's memoirs were published in the immediate post-war years. Anne Frank's famous diary of a young adulthood spent in hiding in Holland, which was first published posthumously in Dutch in 1947 and in English in 1952, and Mary Berg's ghetto diaries, are among them. Memoirs

[12] Ibid., p. 29.
[13] Ibid.

by Hungarian Jewish surgical assistant Olga Lengyel and Polish Jews Krystyna Żywulska and Seweryna Szmaglewska have also been widely read. Romanian Jewish gynaecologist Gisella Perl published her popular testimony, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, in English in 1948, though it subsequently fell out of print until its reissue in 2019, and Italian Jew Giuliana Tedeschi's memoir was initially published in Italian in 1946. Many widely-read ghetto and hiding memoirs were also published, including those by Gusta Davidson-Draenger, Blanca Rosenberg, and Vladka Meed, whose account was originally published in Yiddish. It is also worth noting that while French resistance member Charlotte Delbo's well-known and much-studied trilogy, *Auschwitz and After*, was initially published incrementally in 1965 and 1970, she completed the writing process in 1947.

Many of these memoirs – most notably Anne Frank's diary, which has since become one of the most read books of all time – are enduring, and have been extremely successful, translated into multiple languages and even included on many European primary and secondary education syllabi. The success of Anne Frank's diary, as well as that of Mary Berg, who is deemed 'brave and inspiring' by a reviewer for *The New Yorker* on her book's dust jacket, I posit, could be a result of the universality of their messages and their redemptive tones. After all, accounts of the Holocaust underpinned by hope and faith in humanity, those that may help to allay the guilt of reading audiences in the post-war West, are more palatable for readers than accounts that focus upon the Holocaust's violence and destruction. As will be seen, this anticipates the growing contemporary trend for the production of, and demand for, popular Holocaust testimonies marketed as tales of love, triumph, and hope.

Some women's memoirs published during this era, however, remain relatively underread. Some fell rather quickly out of print or remained untranslated from their initial publication language for decades, and many have since received minimal recognition and

representation in scholarship. These include, but are not limited to, the memoirs of Austrian doctor and Nazi opponent Ella Lingens-Reiner, Moldovan Jewish doctor Sima Vaisman, whose account was published in French in 1945, and German communist Margarete Buber-Neumann, as well as the accounts of German Catholic Nanda Herbermann and Jewish Italian journalist Liana Millu.

Men's testimonies were also widely published during this period. Primo Levi published his seminal memoir, *Se Questo è un Uomo* (*If this is a Man*) in Italian in 1947. It was translated into English in 1959. Likewise, Austrian neurologist and psychologist Viktor Frankl first published his memoir, *Man's Search for Meaning*, in German in 1946. It was translated into English in 1959. Tadeusz Borowski's semi-fictional autobiography, made up of short stories of Auschwitz-Birkenau, was also published originally in 1946 in Polish, and was translated into English in 1967. French writer and political activist, David Rousset, who had been imprisoned in Buchenwald during the war, also released his famous memoir, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, in French in 1945. It was translated into English in 1947. Like some women's accounts published in this time period, many of these men's testimonies remain popular even today, and are comparably premised on universality. Viktor Frankl's memoir, for example, is as much an account of the Holocaust as a tribute to hope from which readers are encouraged to learn. This is made most apparent in the blurb of the 2004 English translation of the book. It explains that the memoir 'offers us an avenue to finding greater meaning and purpose in our own lives.'

iii. Historiography

Previous historiographic representations of women and the Holocaust have had a tendency to categorise women's published memoirs of this period as conforming to certain stylistic and thematic characteristics. Judith Tydor Baumel, for instance, claims that these accounts are characterised by their 'authenticity,' and are 'a more accurate description of their authors' experiences' than later recollections, as 'memory had not yet been blurred by time.'[14] Thus, she concludes, these memoirs are 'a factual, if emotional reconstruction of the authors' wartime experiences, devoid of […] moral preaching.'[15] Yet there is little evidence to support this assumption. Moreover, any process of narrativizing memories is inherently distortive, whether that process begins immediately or decades after the experiences being retold.

It is certainly true that survivors who published their memoirs in the immediate post-war years express few concerns about the steadfastness of their memories, in stark contrast with those publishing in later decades. It would, however, be more accurate to characterise these accounts as those not yet influenced by the popular and scholarly Holocaust discourses that had yet to develop. They are raw and unmodified accounts of their authors' experiences, but are not necessarily any more 'authentic' than those that would follow in later decades. David Cesarani too offers a more nuanced reading of these testimonies than Tydor Baumel, arguing that in the immediate post-war years survivors had 'few inhibitions about what could be said,' as their accounts 'were unmodified by the knowledge of a life lived in the aftermath' of the Holocaust.[16] That is not to say that some of these earlier testimonies are not literary; indeed, many of them, such as those by

[14] Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*, p. 42.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Cesarani, 'Challenging the 'Myth'', p. 29.

Giuliana Tedeschi, Liana Millu and Seweryna Szmaglewska, are exceedingly so. Rather, it is to suggest that their authors do not shy away from candidly documenting the most traumatic and upsetting elements of their experiences, aiming to provide an honest rather than polished version of their histories. This can be seen, for example, in Gisella Perl's candid descriptions of sexual relationships among prisoners in the latrines of Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which I will return later in this chapter.

Tydor Baumel accurately observes, however, that 'the majority of the early women's memoirs began in September 1939, providing only a short description of the author's pre-war life.'[17] This assertion is generally correct, and is evidenced by the testimonies of Gisella Perl, Seweryna Szmaglewska, Krystyna Żywulska, and Sima Vaisman, all of which open their narratives in or after 1942. Most also end their narratives at liberation, or shortly thereafter. Tydor Baumel further notes that 'literature written by female survivors in the 1940s and 1950s […] was often surprisingly revealing about [sexual] matters' and 'concentrated upon experiences which belonged solely to women's culture.'[18] Other scholars echo this observation. Myrna Goldenberg, for example, argues that all women's testimonies 'echo several themes that are unique to women's biology, such as […] vulnerability to rape and other sexual offenses,' though she does clarify that, despite this, few men's and women's testimonies 'discuss actual rapes.'[19] These categorisations are not inaccurate. Liana Millu, for instance, makes multiple references in her 1947 semi-fictionalised testimony to the romantic and sexual relationships that she claims occurred between prisoners in Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which she was deported in 1944. In her story, 'Hard Labour,' she candidly describes the events that took place near a tool shed where a men's work group often retired. She explains:

[17] Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*, p. 42.
[18] Ibid., p. 46.
[19] Goldenberg, 'Lessons Learned', pp. 82 – 83.

> The women would banter a bit, laughing among themselves and acting coy, like women everywhere, until after a while they would slip away along the wall and into the sheds, to emerge only at the evening gong, all red and dishevelled.[20]

She later recalls a conversation with her friend Lise, in which Lise explained her refusal to trade sex for food or other privileges, because 'she wasn't like those little tarts who for a slice of bread would spread themselves out for half the camp. She was a respectable woman who loved her husband.'[21] Not only does Millu unflinchingly portray sexual barter in Auschwitz-Birkenau, but sexual and romantic couplings between inmates that, she claims, occurred despite the daily horrors they faced.

Likewise, Gisella Perl recalls in a particularly matter-of-fact tone that, as well as functioning as a space for washing and socialising, the latrine in Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which she was deported in 1944, 'also served as a "love nest."'[22] With surprising frankness she explains:

> Openly, shamelessly, the dirty, diseased bodies clung together for a minute or two in the fetid atmosphere of the latrine – and the piece of bread, the comb, the little knife wandered from the pocket of the man into the greedy hands of the woman. […] Millions were dying on their feet eaten up alive by lice, hunger, disease – and in the latrines, lying in human excrement before the eyes of their fellow prisoners, men and women were writhing in sexual paroxysm.[23]

In this portrayal, Perl writes of the exchange of sex for rations and other useful possessions with a clear tone of condemnation, her use of the word 'greedy' signalling her distaste for this practice. Furthermore, Perl is remarkably open about women's use of their bodies as bartering tools, and implies that sexual desire, at least for some prisoners, remained intact during their incarcerations. As will be explored further in Chapter 3,

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[20] Liana Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, trans. by Lynne Sharon Schwartz (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), p. 180.
[21] Ibid., p. 181.
[22] Gisella Perl, *I Was A Doctor in Auschwitz* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), p. 55.
[23] Ibid., p. 56.

many of the women memoirists whose accounts were published during this period also provide illuminating representations of erotic and sexual interactions between prisoners of the same sex. This openness about sex, I contend, can be partly attributed to the fact that in the 1940s and 1950s, and even as late as the 1960s, Holocaust experiences had not yet become significantly homogenised. Authors did not feel the need to produce memoirs that conformed to a normative standard of Holocaust testimony because one did not yet exist, the precedent for how a (woman's) survivor memoir *should* be written had not yet been established. Comparatively few testimonies had, by this point, been widely published (considerably more were published in the 1990s). As such, a dialogue between testimonies through which they shaped and influenced one another was not yet in play. Those writing earlier had no comparative testimonial yardstick with which to measure the acceptability of the content of their memoirs, and thus, as can be seen, wrote frankly about matters of sexuality. Tydor Baumel offers a similar explanation for this pattern, arguing that this openness about sexuality is connected with the forthrightness of earlier memoirs, 'whose authors did not attempt to "beautify" their experiences for their potential audience.'[24]

Additionally, it has been widely observed that women's memoirs written both immediately after the war and in the decades that followed emphasise, in the words of Brana Gurewitsch, 'the tendency of women to form close and long-lasting relationships that become a source of mutual assistance and strength.'[25] Tydor Baumel argues that 'virtually all of the women's memoirs written during this early period emphasized the role of female self-help and mutual assistance in their authors' survival.'[26] This particularity, she claims, would:

[24] Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*, p. 47.
[25] Gurewitsch, *Mothers, Sisters, Resistors*, p. xviii.
[26] Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*, p. 42.

> later help scholars in analysing women as historical subjects in wartime. Examples of this are the recent studies on women's mutual assistance during the war, particularly in women's camps, as an explanation of their ability to survive under conditions which were often worse than those which men were forced to endure.[27]

Many scholars of the mid-to-late 1990s, when the narrative of women behaving as nurturers and carers during the Holocaust began to dominate historiography, used women's memoirs to support these claims while overlooking those inconsistent with their theories. In the words of Baer and Goldenberg, the fact that some women's testimonies *do* reveal 'the consciousness of women *during the Holocaust* to nurture and be nurtured by other women – natural or surrogate sisters, mothers, or daughters,' was enough to consolidate assumptions about their collective behaviours.[28]

Yet, as will be further explored in the following chapter, women's testimonies published in the immediate post-war years feature few depictions of long-lasting friendships formed during the Holocaust, or of sustained efforts of mutual support or solidarity between women. The idealised trope of women's mutual aid groups and surrogate family formation, in fact, became more prevalent in women's accounts published after the 1970s, once a normative women's Holocaust experience, and indeed a standard formula for women's narratives, had been established. The development of women's studies as an academic field in the 1970s also meant that historiography increasingly placed emphasis on women's supportive relationships; this undoubtedly impacted the manner in which women retold their stories. It is perhaps for this reason that women's memoirs produced in the immediate post-war years tend to feature only brief representations of women's cooperation and support groups. Yet even these scant portrayals have bolstered the notion that, to cite Goldenberg, 'virtually all memoirs by

[27] Ibid.
[28] Baer and Goldenberg, *Experience and Expression*, p. xiii. Italics Goldenberg's own.

women implicitly or explicitly credit survival to some manner of women's friendships and collaborations.'[29]

Olga Lengyel was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944 with her husband and children; she alone survived. In her 1947 memoir Lengyel writes sparingly of comradeship with the women of the camp. When recalling her time living in Room 13 of Camp E's hospital block (in which she worked) with four other women, she concedes: 'We knew what there was to know about one another; we laughed together and we cried together.'[30] Indeed, circumstantial companionship rather than loyal friendships characterises Lengyel's narrative. She later dedicates a brief passage to a Russian surgeon of the hospital who, she claims, saved her life when she was caught trying to reach Barrack 30 of the men's camp as part of a mission with the camp's underground organisation:

> She could have told the guard that I had left the group without permission, and washed her hands of the whole affair. Instead, she had waited for me. Noticing that the blankets were missing from the stretcher, she had found a clever excuse, and saved me. She was, indeed, a good comrade.[31]

This, however, is depicted as an isolated instance of kindness, a generous gesture by a stranger, rather than as part of a wider network of women's caretaking activities, to which Lengyel does not refer.

Likewise, Nanda Herbermann, transported to Ravensbrück in August 1941 after time spent in solitary confinement in Münster for her anti-Nazism work, documents in her 1946 memoir that her time at the camp was spent largely in solitude. She acknowledges that after having been moved to Block I she formed a connection with

[29] Goldenberg, 'Lessons Learned', p. 86.
[30] Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: A Woman's Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers), p. 147.
[31] Ibid., p. 173.

some other prisoners, explaining: 'I found a few inmates there with whom I had a natural affinity.'[32] She also documents that, after being released from a punishment cell, the prostitutes of her block had saved her some potatoes and bread, admitting that she 'loved them all very much for this,' and recalls how, towards the end of her incarceration in Ravensbrück, she and 'good comrade' Halina assisted one another.[33] Yet this is the extent of representations of help and support provided by other women in her account. Considerably more of her memoir is in fact dedicated to the portrayal of her own self-imposed isolation in Ravensbrück, and the hostility she claims to have felt toward her fellow inmates, and particularly the prostitutes of Block I.

Many other memoirs published at this time also detail prisoner isolation with some frequency. It is not until the 200th page of her 335-page 1945 memoir that Seweryna Szmaglewska discusses friendship in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she was incarcerated between 1942 and 1945. Even then, this reference is a somewhat universalised one, rather than a personal anecdote about a specific companion. She writes: 'the taste of friendship is sweeter here than elsewhere – and more bitter too.'[34] She later expands upon this: 'warm bonds have been formed, which in the terror-ridden circumstances develop from casual liking into close friendships and sisterhood.'[35] No evidence of this, however, emerges in her account. On the whole, the testimonies of Lengyel and Herbermann, and many of the others published in the decade after the end of the war, do not support the traditional narrative – and enduring myth – that women's Holocaust experiences and their retellings show women in the Holocaust to have relied, in R. Ruth Linden's words, on a

[32] Nanda Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate #6582 in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp for Women*, ed. by Hester Baer and Elizabeth R. Baer, trans. by Hester Baer (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), p. 199.
[33] Ibid., p. 145; Ibid., p. 205.
[34] Seweryna Szmaglewska, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, trans. by Jadwiga Rynas (Warsaw: Publishing House "Ksiazka i Wiedza", 2001), p. 200.
[35] Ibid., p. 212.

'fundamentally social process' grounded in 'the interdependence of human beings upon one another for life itself.'[36]

Finally, Tydor Baumel categorises these memoirs as generally concentrating 'upon experiences which belonged solely to women's culture. This was highly unusual at a time,' she adds, 'when it was uncommon to conceptualise gender.'[37] Problematically, Tydor Baumel offers no evidence to support this claim, nor does she provide any clarification as to her definition of 'women's culture.' Consequently, it is difficult to corroborate or refute this assertion, particularly as it is unclear whether she references the representation of learned, traditionally feminine practices and gendered behaviours, and if so, which ones, or those related to women's biology, such as menstruation and amenorrhea, pregnancy, and childbirth. Nonetheless, an examination of the memoirs published during this era shows that, at least with regards to representations of women's biology and conformity to traditional gender roles, generalisations are difficult to make. While some memoirists give considerable focus to women's biology and the experiences that pertain to it, others reference it sparingly. Likewise, representations of traditionally feminine practices are usually brief, though there are some notable exceptions to this rule.

Unsurprisingly, the testimonies written by women who served as camp doctors during their incarcerations, among them Sima Vaisman, Olga Lengyel, Gisella Perl and Ella Lingens-Reiner, all of whom worked in hospital blocks at Auschwitz-Birkenau, reference issues related to women's unique biological experiences with far greater regularity than those written by other survivors. Vaisman, for example, writes mournfully in her testimony, written only eight days after her liberation and published originally in French in 1945, of women in Birkenau, heading towards the gas chamber, 'still giving

[36] R. Ruth Linden, *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1993), p. 5.
[37] Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*, p. 42.

their breast full of life, full of sap, to keep their babies from crying,' while Gisella Perl dedicates an entire chapter and multiple further paragraphs to portraying childbirth, pregnancy, and infanticide at the same camp.[38] Having witnessed SS soldiers lie to the pregnant women of Camp C of Birkenau, promising them transfer to another camp in order to torment and beat them before sending them to the crematory alive, Perl swore, she claims, to save the remaining pregnant women of Camp C from the same fate. She recalls that she decided to save the lives of mothers using her medical expertise, while killing the infants who would have sentenced the mothers to death had they remained alive. She claims that:

> On dark nights […] in dark corners of the camp, […] I delivered their babies. […] After the child had been delivered, I quickly bandaged the mother's abdomen and sent her back to work. When possible, I placed her in my hospital […]. No one will ever know what it meant to me to destroy these babies. […] I loved those newborn babies not as a doctor but as a mother and it was again and again my own child whom I killed to save the life of a woman.[39]

Likewise, Olga Lengyel lends an entire chapter of her memoir to births in the camp. Like Perl, she claims in her retelling that herself and other infirmary staff made the decision to kill new born babies in order to save the lives of the mothers. 'Unfortunately, the fate of the baby always had to be the same,' she writes, adding that, '[a]fter taking every precaution, we pinched and closed the little tike's nostrils and when it opened its mouth to breathe, we gave it a dose of a lethal product.'[40] She also documents working in hospital block of Camp FKL in Auschwitz-Birkenau. She describes how the most beautiful women inmates were used by Nazi doctors in the camp for experiments in

[38] Sima Vaisman, *A Jewish Doctor in Auschwitz: The Testimony of Sima Vaisman*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (Hoboken: Melville House Publishing, 2005), p. 53.
[39] Perl, *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, pp. 57 – 58.
[40] Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, p. 114.

artificial insemination, while others were injected with sex hormones that caused painful abscesses.[41] Another prisoner, she explains:

> had been used as a guinea pig in sterilization experiments, and when she returned to the hospital she was no longer female. […] [S]he was resolved never to see [her fiancé] again. Rather than admit her degradation, she chose to pass for dead.[42]

Contrastingly, memoirs of the 1940s and 1950s by women who did not serve as medical staff at any time during their incarceration focus far less on women's unique, biology-related experiences. Nanda Herbermann, for instance, does not write at all about her own experiences of menstruation or amenorrhea in Ravensbrück, nor that of other women prisoners. She also does not describe pregnancy or childbirth, though this is largely because Ravensbrück was a concentration camp for women only, thus few pregnancies occurred within the camp. Seweryna Szmaglewska also generally avoids these topics, while Liana Millu's reflections are limited to those on women working in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp brothel, whose use of their bodies, she suggests, afforded them a degree of protection from camp selections, as is further discussed in Chapter 2.

One noteworthy exception to the patterns typically followed by memoirs published during this time period is Giuliana Tedeschi's 1946 account of her incarceration in Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which she was deported in 1944, entitled *There is a Place on Earth: A Woman in Birkenau*. Tedeschi writes emphatically about the women's general desire to form friendships and to support one another in the camp, and even references by name many of the close friends with whom she claims to have been imprisoned. She recalls tenderly how one evening in Block 13, the quarantine block, the women dealt with separation from their husbands and families by talking to one another. She writes:

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[41] Ibid., p. 190.
[42] Ibid., p. 193.

> the women got to know each other, talked about themselves, learned to appreciate each other. So I discovered Zilly's hand, a small, warm hand, modest and patient, which held mine in the evening, which pulled up the blankets around my shoulders, while a calm, motherly voice whispered in my ear, "Good night, dear – I have a daughter your age!"[43]

As well as Zilly, Tedeschi also describes particularly close friendships with prisoners named Olga, Tery, Dina, Ruth, and Gerty, of whom she explains, 'we kept together, in pairs, like the valves of a clam, since […] there was now the constant nightmare of becoming isolated, uncomprehended by the others, and hence their victims.'[44] Unlike most other women's memoirs to be published at this time, Tedeschi's unique account is underscored by references to close female bonds and the representation of nurturance among women, though notably, she is also careful to write of becoming the potential 'victim' of other women prisoners.

In a similarly unusual manner, Tedeschi pays particular attention to such uniquely female experiences in Auschwitz-Birkenau as motherhood and maternal feeling, as well as amenorrhea, loss of femininity, and fears about infertility, which she implies were interconnected for many women prisoners. She explains:

> Those bodies […] had neither vitality nor sex. Having lost their menstruations as a result of malnutrition and shock, the women no longer felt they were women. […] We thought that if ever we returned, this transformation would condemn us to solitude and incomprehension.[45]

Even more striking are her reflections on Nazism's attack on women prisoners' maternal instincts, and the resulting pain that, she suggests, was suffered by women who had become mothers before or during their incarcerations, and even those who were not biological mothers at all. Using figurative language and a seamless transition between

[43] Giuliana Tedeschi, *There is a Place on Earth: A Woman in Birkenau*, trans. by Tim Parks (London: Minerva, 1994), pp. 9–10.
[44] Ibid., p. 56.
[45] Ibid., pp. 97 – 98.

past and present tense to express her own trauma at the separation from her children, Tedeschi explains of a family in her barrack:

> I saw the dark shadow of the mother bent over a heap of filthy rags wrapped around the baby's puny legs, and a serious, already adult expression in the eyes of the other children. The agonizing desire to take the baby in my arms […] My own younger baby girl was in her cot, pink with sleep […] Through the frosted glass of the bedroom door, visible in filtered light from the corridor, appeared the silhouette of the visored cap of an SS man. […] In her little bed my other little girl's blue eyes widened and darkened with fear. "Mummy, come back soon."[46]

She later describes how '[m]emories of early motherhood, its infinite, overwhelming sweetness, flooded back like a torture, a physical need,' during her imprisonment, and dedicates lengthy passages to recalling families in Block 13 that had, she claims, by some administrative error, been allowed to stay together.[47] Tedeschi explains that, when it was decided by the SS that the children were to be removed from Block 13: 'All the women, not just the mothers, sensed in the welling rebellion in their guts that something had been violently torn from the maternal instinct that lay at the very core of their being.'[48]

In conclusion, the women's memoirs published in the immediate post-war years were primarily efforts to candidly retell the authors' experiences of the Holocaust, and often feature little, if any, descriptions of life before or after the war. They were typically accounts written for the sake of remembrance and documentation, rather than those beautified or catered to a Western, or post-war West, readership. These accounts tend to include the raw emotions of their authors, as well as forthright representations of taboo subjects that would, in later decades, feature less frequently and frankly in retrospective testimonies. These topics include sex and eroticism. Yet, these accounts could not be described as any more 'authentic' than memoirs published in later decades. Many were

[46] Ibid., pp. 17 – 18.
[47] Ibid., p. 45.
[48] Ibid., p. 52.

written in a variety of European languages, translated into English years or even decades after their initial publication. Though some were originally written in English, such as the account of Gisella Perl, these testimonies were generally not produced for the Anglophone world.

These memoirs also do not particularly focus upon representations of friendships and mutual support among women, and rarely discuss surrogate family formation or life-saving female bonds. Lastly, authors with a medical background or who worked as camp medics during the Holocaust write relatively openly, and often at length, about topics pertaining to women's biology. According to their own accounts, many of them helped to deliver – and for the safety of the mother, kill – new born babies in Auschwitz-Birkenau, while others were better positioned than other prisoners to witness and document Nazi experiments on women and their cruelty to new mothers. Other authors, however, infrequently write of fears about sterility, menstruation, and other specifically female experiences or normative feminine practices. Being the first of their kind, the women's memoirs published during this time period were not informed by testimonial and historiographical Holocaust discourses which had yet to be established. As such, their style and content is generally unmediated by notions of acceptability (of survivor behaviour and narratives) and appropriateness.

II. The mid-1950s – 1960s

i. The Legitimation of Survivor Accounts

Between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s there was a notable dip in the publication of Holocaust memoirs generally, with only a small number of accounts appearing in print

after the initial surge of testimony production in the immediate post-war years. Some scholars have proffered explanations for this fall in publication numbers. According to Tydor Baumel, for instance, the reasons for the decrease were threefold. Firstly, she argues, many survivors were still concentrating on rebuilding their lives after the Holocaust in the 1950s and 1960s, and thus had little time to dedicate to writing their Holocaust accounts. Secondly, some survivors who may have originally planned to publish memoirs came to the realisation, she contends, that the reading audience for such texts was very small. Further than that, she also argues that financial reasons and operating sociological frameworks (lack of multiculturalism in the West/survivors' desires to integrate into the culture of their adopted nations) of the time may have contributed to a decrease in testimonies published during this period.[49]

Despite these factors, however, and in spite of the apparent decline in popularity of Holocaust memoirs in this period, some women *did* choose to publish their accounts between the mid-1950s and the 1960s. Polish Jewish writer Gerda Weissmann Klein, deported to Bolkenhain concentration camp in 1942, claims that language barriers prevented her from recounting her story in the years immediately following the war.[50] Thus, her memoir emerged some years afterwards, in 1957, once she had mastered the English language:

> Many [survivors] married other survivors who spoke little English, and for years they could not break out of the world of their native tongue. That makes it more difficult to speak of the past, because the memories are apt to turn into the living present.[51]

It is possible that, like Weissman Klein, other survivors published their memoirs in this period because it took them a number of years to adequately learn the language of their

[49] Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*, p. 45.
[50] Bolkenhain was a forced labour camp and a subcamp of the Gross-Rosen concentration camp complex. It was located in the German village of Gross-Rosen.
[51] Gerda Weissmann Klein, *All But My Life* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), p. 255.

adopted country, and it proved too traumatic to chronicle their experiences in their native languages. Halina Birenbaum, on the other hand, who spent time incarcerated in Majdanek, Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and Neustadt-Glewe concentration camps,[52] suggests that the Eichmann Trial, and its broadcast of survivor testimonies, inspired her own choice to publish her account in 1967:

> [t]he Eichmann trial proved a great turning point in my life […] I *lived* the trial […] I saw clearly all the scenes from the past […] I returned to my true self. […] But in many of the witnesses' shocking statements that were heard at the trial I felt something was missing, something very familiar to me – the unceasing feeling of terror that existed in living among all those horrors.'[53]

In April 1961 the trial of Nazi SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann took place in the Jerusalem District Court and was broadcast by American television networks. The prosecution case involved the use of 112 witnesses and hundreds of documents, and resulted in Eichmann's conviction for crimes against humanity and war crimes, among others. He was sentenced to death by hanging in December 1961. The trial marked a watershed in global interest in the events of the Holocaust because unlike at the Nuremberg Trials, which took place between 1945 and 1946, survivors were not only permitted to testify in the courtroom, but were made the centrepiece of the trial. To a degree, the trial was more about allowing viewers to understand the Holocaust through identification with its victims – who were allowed 'to talk almost as long as they wished' – rather than serving justice to Adolf Eichmann himself.[54] Ultimately, the Eichmann Trial turned both public and academic interest to the experiences of the Holocaust's victims to

[52] Majdanek concentration camp, also sometimes known as KL Lublin, was a German concentration and extermination camp located near the city of Lublin in eastern Poland. Gas chambers began operating at Majdanek in 1942. Neustadt-Glewe was a satellite camp of Ravensbrück concentration camp for women.
[53] Birenbaum, *Hope is the Last to Die*, p. x. Italics Birenbaum's own.
[54] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, intro. by Amos Elon (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 121.

a greater degree than ever before (despite the earlier efforts of survivors and scholars), and legitimised the stories of survivors as sources of important historical evidence.

Hannah Arendt also reported on the trial for *The New Yorker*. The revised and extended edition of the report, entitled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of the Evil*, was published as a monograph in 1964. Both were widely read around the globe. Furthermore, the early 1960s saw a boom in Holocaust research, with many large-scale academic studies emerging. Among them were Raul Hilberg's 1961 study *The Destruction of the European Jews* – which was the basis for Arendt's report – and Hans Kohn's 1960 treatise *The Mind of Germany: The Education of a Nation*. Though these studies were received at the time with a lack of interest and even hostility, they served to pave the way for growing public consciousness about, and scholarly interest in, the Holocaust and the persecution of Europe's Jewry. It is likely, therefore, that the trial, and particularly its broadcast, which shifted the focus of global Holocaust memory to its victims, served to inspire survivors to publish their accounts for a reading audience with a renewed interest in the Holocaust in the 1960s.

ii. Women's Memoirs

The women's memoirs published during this period include Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*, the German testimony of German Jew Lucie Adelsberger and the Polish accounts of Halina Birenbaum and Wanda Półtawska. Polish Jew Janina David's two short accounts were published in 1964 and 1966, and the memoirs of Gerda Weissmann Klein and Kitty Hart were also published in the late 1950s and early 1960s respectively. Some of these testimonies have come under considerable scholarly scrutiny. Charlotte Delbo's testimony, for example, published initially in French, has been the subject of a number of dedicated, full-length monographs and articles, and has featured heavily in

more general studies of survivor writing and the Holocaust experiences of members of the French resistance.

Similarly, Kitty Hart, later Kitty Hart-Moxon, a Polish Jewish survivor deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943, aged 16, is relatively well-known, particularly in Britain, where she emigrated after the war. Since the publication of her first memoir, *I Am Alive*, in English in 1961, she has featured in two British documentaries. The first, *Kitty: Return to Auschwitz*, inspired the lengthening and re-release of her memoir under the title *Return to Auschwitz* in 1981, while the latter, *Death March: A Survivor's Story*, produced by the BBC in 2003, saw her retrace the steps of the death march she took during the war. Parts of her story and testimony are also featured in a permanent exhibition at The National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Nottinghamshire. Yet conversely, some of the memoirs published in this period remain in relative obscurity. Wanda Półtawska's 1961 memoir, *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*, for instance, originally published in Polish and translated into English in 1987, has received little popular attention. Of the men's memoirs published during this period, Elie Wiesel's *Night* is the most well-known, and has since gained global recognition. Initially published in French in 1958 'as a heavily edited version of an earlier Yiddish memoir,' it was translated into English in 1960.[55]

iii. Historiography

Given that relatively few memoirs by women were published during this era, there is little – if any – extant critical literature that addresses them collectively. The lack of source material means that it has been difficult for scholars – or perhaps of little interest to them

[55] The Holocaust Educational Trust, *Teaching the Holocaust in English* (London: The Holocaust Educational Trust, [2018]), p. 12.

– to attempt to establish the thematic and stylistic characteristics that typify women's memoirs of the mid-1950s and 1960s. Thus, no comfortable consensus about the shared tropes or patterns of these testimonies has been reached. In lieu of those dedicated studies, I will provide a brief overview of characteristics generally evident among the women's accounts produced during this time period.

In the first instance, this small group of memoirs tend to open at the outbreak of the Second World War, and typically do not offer detailed accounts of the authors' pre-war lives. The 1956 memoir of Lucie Adelsberger, a German Jewish physician deported to Auschwitz in 1943, and later to Ravensbrück, evidences this. Its narrative opens in Germany in 1938 as restrictions were beginning to be placed upon the Jewish community of Germany. Likewise, Janina David's 1964 memoir *A Square of Sky*, which describes her years in the Warsaw ghetto and then in hiding in Poland under false papers, begins in the summer of 1939, though her narrative does later return to a description of her earlier life. Gerda Weissmann Klein's 1957 memoir, *All but My Life*, recounts her time spent working in a textile mill in Bolkenhain concentration camp, and in forced labour camps in Landeshut, Gruenberg and Marzdorf. It begins on the 3rd September 1939 at exactly 9:10am, as German troops invaded the author's home town of Bielsko. Of the women memoirists who published their accounts in this era, only Halina Birenbaum opens her 1967 memoir with recollections about her childhood and family life in Warsaw, before beginning her story of the Holocaust in 1939.

These testimonies also have a tendency to end their narratives at, or shortly after, liberation. This pattern is striking, and speaks to the authors' concern solely with documenting their Holocaust experiences. Even those who return later in their accounts to the wider context of their Holocaust stories foreground the event itself. With even greater specificity, Lucie Adelsberger explains in the preface to the 1997 English

translation of her memoir that her account is, at its core, about Auschwitz. She writes: 'I've tried my best to tell [Auschwitz] as it was.'[56] This pattern also points, for the first time, to a developing dialogue among women's memoirs. As abovementioned, many testimonies that were published in the immediate post-war years are explicitly dedicated to narrating the Holocaust experiences of their authors, and to that end, open either during or at the beginning of the Second World War. Being the first of their kind to emerge after the Holocaust, these testimonies set an early precedent for the structure of a Holocaust memoir. Those writing between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s appear to have followed this pattern established by the first published women's testimonies; they generally begin and end their narratives as the Second World War began and ended, rather than featuring the Holocaust as the disruptive central occurrence within a longer narrative arc.

This testimonial discourse is also apparent in the rawness of the memoirs published between the mid-1950s and the 1960s. Like many – though not all – of their earlier counterparts, these testimonies can generally be characterised as matter-of-fact in tone. More than that, few of these memoirs could be described as particularly literary or overly descriptive, with the exception of Charlotte Delbo's highly literary trilogy, *Auschwitz and After*.[57] Additionally, these memoirs often display, for the first time in women's accounts, a thematic focus on supportive mother-daughter relationships, especially as they developed in ghettos and concentration camps. While Lucie Adelsberger claims that she passed up the opportunity to emigrate before deportation in order to remain in Germany to care for her sick mother, Halina Birenbaum repeatedly makes reference in her testimony to her mother as a pillar of safety and security. She

[56] Lucie Adelsberger, *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Story*, trans. by Susay Ray, intro. by Deborah Lipstadt (London: BCA, 1997), p. 133.

[57] Its amalgamation of poetry and prose, its non-linear chronology, and its subtle transition between individual and collective memory, as well as past and present tense, make *Auschwitz and After* a testimony that evades simple categorisation. Delbo's narrative is both self-consciously literary and almost post-modern in its multiple genres and fracturing of time.

writes that she was not afraid as the horror of deportation began because she was 'profoundly convinced that [mother] would find us a way out of the worst situation.' [58] In comparison to her father, who instilled panic in his children because 'he was so upset and terrified' that 'he thought that to disobey the Storm Troopers could only hasten our doom,' Birenbaum represents her mother as resilient and inspiring, 'as always – serene.'[59] Eventually, while her father was forced onto a boxcar and deported, she claims, Birenbaum and her brother were pulled away from the waiting trains and to safety by their mother.

Notably, following the tradition of the memoirs that preceded them, women's published memoirs of this era do not give undue or remarkable focus to the formation of camp families and friendships as aids to survival, though they do portray such relationships to a notably greater degree than their earlier counterparts. Gerda Weissmann Klein, for instance, briefly makes reference to a friend named Ilse, with whom she was incarcerated in Bolkenhain concentration camp, and Lucie Adelsberger recalls the formation of a camp surrogate family. She remembers how, on arrival at Auschwitz in May 1943, 'two girls […] spoiled me rotten with all sorts of kindnesses […] one of them declared herself my mother and the other my grandmother from that moment on.'[60] She goes on to explain:

> There were many families like this and everyone had her own. They were not motivated by trivialities, but rather by a genuine sense of solidarity among people who shared each other's grisly fate and felt responsible for one another, often putting their own lives in jeopardy by denying themselves the very morsel of bread the needed for their own survival, and that they formed a family more tightly knit than many a natural one, was something exceptional.[61]

[58] Birenbaum, *Hope is the Last*, p. 25.
[59] Ibid., p. 26.
[60] Adelsberger, *A Doctor's Story*, p. 99.
[61] Ibid.

Of all of the memoirs published during this period, only those of Halina Birenbaum and Charlotte Delbo significantly emphasise women's support networks, referring often to women's reciprocal caretaking efforts and nurturance. This trend, established by women's memoirs published between the mid-1950s and the late-1960s, would later be built upon and developed by women's accounts published in the decades that followed, which dedicate considerable space to the representation of women's supportive relationships. While the memoirs published in this period cannot be characterised as overly concerned with the portrayal of women's mutual aid during incarceration, to which references are, on the whole, relatively scarce, they can be credited with the emergence of a thematic pattern that would, in the decades that followed, gain greater significance in women's accounts.

These memoirs also rarely dedicate space to unique women's experiences, among them pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. Lucie Adelsberger, who, like Lengyel and Perl, among others, acted as a prisoner-physician in Auschwitz-Birkenau, lends a short chapter to motherhood in the camp, explaining that women who arrived pregnant were condemned to the gas chamber or suffered coerced abortions. Babies who were born in camp, she claims, had to be killed by the physicians, including Adelsberger herself, because 'the child had to die so that the life of the mother might be saved.'[62] Adelsberger's reflections are likely attributable to her medical background. Generally speaking, however, descriptions of such experiences are uncommon in memoirs published during this period.

In summary, the majority of the women's memoirs published between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s were published in European languages such as German, French and Polish. Though those of Kitty Hart and Gerda Weissman Klein were initially

[62] Ibid., p. 101.

published in English in the UK and the USA, most were not originally published for the Anglophone world. Halina Birenbaum's testimony, published in Polish in 1967, was translated and published in English in 1971 by M E Sharpe publishing, while Lucie Adelsberger's German testimony, published in 1956, did not emerge in English until 1995. Likewise, Wanda Półtawska's Polish memoir was published in 1961, but was translated into English and sold in the UK in 1987 and in the USA in 1989. Like many of their earlier counterparts, these memoirs were typically not produced for an English-speaking audience, and were largely not marketed toward such a readership until their later translations. Similarly, in keeping with the patterns established by their predecessors, these testimonies tend to avoid detailed descriptions of life before and after the Holocaust, and often begin their narratives at the outbreak of, or during, the war, and conclude shortly after liberation. The testimonies that have been rereleased and expanded after their initial publication, and particularly those that have been translated into English decades after the Holocaust, however, do often feature an epilogue about the authors' post-Holocaust experiences and achievements or the long-term impact of the Holocaust, as can be seen in those by Weissman Klein and Półtawska. This speaks to the manner in which the authors and their publishers tailored later editions of their accounts to a Western readership, while the intended audience for earlier, European editions was not English-speaking.

Furthermore, these accounts show, for the first time, a developing influential discourse among women's accounts, as is evidenced by their notable stylistic and thematic imitations of earlier women's testimonies. These memoirs generally avoid a literary style, and tend to offer matter-of-fact – rather than overly descriptive – retellings of the authors' experiences. These memoirs focus only minimally – though considerably more so than their earlier counterparts – on women's bonds, friendships, mutual aid

groups, and surrogate families, and representations of strong mother-daughter relationships are a notable feature. As will be seen, this increased emphasis on women's relationships would inform, and be built upon by, women's memoirs of later decades. Representations of women's biology-related experiences are also generally avoided in these accounts.

III. The 1970s – the mid-1990s

i. Global Holocaust Consciousness: A Period of Transition

In the USA and Britain, as well as Israel and much of western Europe, the early 1970s marked a period of transition in which, to a greater extent than ever before, the Holocaust as experienced by its victims began to occupy a space in popular consciousness. The production and consumption of Holocaust memoirs rapidly increased, and representations of the event in popular culture became widespread. Much scholarship has been dedicated to attempting to explain this development, and to charting the manner in which interest in the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust has continued – and grown – since this period, reaching its zenith in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Some scholars have contended that the emergence of a culture of victimization in the 1970s, particularly in the USA, truly caused public attention to be turned toward the Holocaust for the first time since the end of the Second World War.

In his contentious book, *The Holocaust Industry*, for instance, Norman Finkelstein attributes this development of interest to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, after which, he

contends, 'the Holocaust became a fixture in American Jewish life.'[63] He goes on to suggest that domestic factors also contributed to a growing Holocaust consciousness in both the USA and the wider Western world in the 1970s and 1980s that had not existed before. These factors were, he argues, 'the recent emergence of "identity politics," on the one hand, and the "culture of victimization," on the other hand. In effect, each identity was grounded in a particular history of oppression; Jews accordingly sought their own ethnic identity in the Holocaust.'[64] In his monograph, *The Holocaust in American Life*, Peter Novick amplifies Finkelstein's sentiments, claiming that 'by the 1980s and 1990s many [American] Jews, for various reasons, wanted to establish that they too were members of a "victim community,"' and therefore cultivated an interest in – and began to identify with – the Holocaust. This interest, he argues, quickly pervaded American society more generally because of the 'important role that Jews played in American media.'[65]

Yet these conclusions are premised not only on the notion that there was a post-war silence – on the part of survivors and scholars, and in Western culture – about the Holocaust that was broken in the 1970s by a flurry of commemorative activity, but that global interest in the Holocaust initially emerged over two decades after the end of the Second World War. As has been previously discussed, this was not the case. Instead, while interest in and awareness of the Holocaust in the immediate post-war years was largely confined to small, specialised sections of the population – scholars, survivors, Jewish communities – in the post-war West and elsewhere, the Eichmann Trial and its televisation signalled a shift, creating an increased and more widespread interest in the

[63] Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2003), p. 16.
[64] Ibid., p. 32.
[65] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2000), pp. 8 – 9; Ibid., pp. 12.

Holocaust in Western culture between the 1970s and the 1990s.[66] Rather than spontaneously booming during this period, however, this interest had, in fact, been steadily developing since World War Two's end, when a groundwork of literature on the Holocaust had been laid. Anne Roth offers a comparable explanation for this shift in Holocaust awareness. She contends that the Eichmann Trial introduced Western culture to a fascination with the trauma of others:

> The Eichmann trial not only introduced the significant notion that the genocide of European Jewry was a distinct and defining event in twentieth-century history, but it also constitutes the first key instance of popular trauma culture. It infused Western culture with the pain of others, to use Susan Sontag's famous phrase, represented in historically and politically decontextualized narratives.[67]

It was within this climate that, as is now a somewhat well-worn narrative in Holocaust discourses, 'the escalation of public attention to the events known […] as "the Holocaust"' resulted in the greater consumption of memoirs of survival and filmic representations of the Holocaust, as well as the creation of Holocaust memorials, museums, and archives.[68]

More than that, many elderly Holocaust survivors were, by the 1970s, beginning to pass away, while the memory of others, impacted by trauma and the passing of time, had begun to fade. Thus, historians, and even to an extent, the public, became concerned with the eventual and inevitable loss of first-hand witness testimony of the Holocaust. In order to mitigate this loss, scholars began making large-scale efforts to record and preserve survivor testimonies. It is this concern to which Noah Shenker attributes the increased scholarly interest in recording oral testimonies during this period. He explains

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[66] Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 1.
[67] Anne Rothe, *Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in the Mass Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), p. 2.
[68] David Cesarani, 'Holocaust Controversies in the 1990s: The Revenge of History or the History of Revenge?', *Journal of Israeli History*, 23:1 (2004), 78 – 90 (p. 78).

in his book, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, that 'the period between the late 1970s and the early 1990s saw a proliferation of video Holocaust testimony archives in the United States' that 'emerged in anticipation of the passing of the survivor community.'[69]

Annette Wieviorka, on the other hand, argues that contemporary considerations and political factors motivated a spike in interest in the collection of testimonies, and in victim experiences of the Holocaust more widely. She claims that 'the systematic collection of audiovisual testimonies began' and 'testimony projects and archives proliferated,' largely because 'in the 1970s the ideology of human rights triumphed,' and as a result of this, 'the individual was […] placed at the heart of society and, retrospectively, of history.'[70] She further contends that another reason for the increased collection and publication of survivor accounts at this time was that 'the global context had changed. The genocide of the Jews was now a strong presence in political life in France, Israel, and the United States.' [71] This is reflected in the student protests in both West Germany and France in the late 1960s. In 1968 in France civil unrest made up of major strikes and demonstrations against consumerism and capitalism abounded, while in the same year the German Student Movement, a protest against the authoritarianism of the West German government, reached its peak. Students railed against the fascism they perceived as continuing to reign in West Germany and confronted their parents' generation about the crimes they committed during the Nazi regime. Human rights issues were therefore beginning to take centre stage in both public and political discourses in the Western world, and this in itself created a space in which survivor testimonies were well received.

[69] Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. x.
[70] Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, pp. 96 – 97.
[71] Ibid., p. 96.

Some of the most notable cultural representations and commemorative projects to occur in this period include the 1978 release of popular television miniseries, *Holocaust*, which was broadcast first in the USA and later in France and Germany, and the 1993 opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The museum stands adjacent to the National Mall in Washington DC and is in close proximity to the Washington monument. Following this, in 1994, Steven Spielberg's feature film, *Schindler's List*, was released to great critical acclaim; it won numerous awards and accolades. In the same year, Spielberg created the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, a project that aimed to video record the oral testimonies of survivors of the Holocaust. These events in the USA coincided with a more general renewed scholarly interest in the collection of oral, audio- and videotaped survivor testimonies of the Holocaust, which inspired Wieviorka to term these years 'the era of the witness.'[72] Others, such as David Cesarani and Eric Sundquist, deemed this a period 'during which testimony along with scholarship and representations in many media, began to flow more rapidly toward the floodtide of the 1990s.'[73]

ii. Women's Memoirs

Between the 1970s and the mid-1990s, many survivors began writing and publishing their memoirs of the Holocaust for the first time, while others released hitherto unpublished accounts for a public readership. Some survivors whose testimonies had been published decades earlier, such as Kitty Hart-Moxon, chose to extend and rerelease their accounts to cater for a reading audience with a renewed interest in survivor stories. Among the

[72] Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, p. 96
[73] Cesarani and Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust*, p. 202.

most well-known of the men's testimonies to emerge at this time are Primo Levi's first book of essays about his Holocaust experiences, *The Drowned and the Saved*, originally published in 1986, and Roman Frister's 1993 memoir, *The Cap: The Price of a Life*.

During this period there was a considerable spike in the publication of women's accounts. This surge, I posit, can be attributed not only to an increased and ever-growing global interest in the Holocaust, but to both the emergence of women's studies as an academic discipline and the proliferation of second wave feminism in the Western world in the 1960s and 1970s. The former placed women's lives and experiences at the centre of critical study, and drew heavily on gender and feminist theory as means of analysis. It gained real traction in the 1970s, particularly in the USA, and began to influence historical research in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At this point, feminist historians began working to show the valuable insights to be gained from applying a critical women's studies approach to Holocaust testimonies, and turned their attention to those written by female survivors. The second wave feminist movement similarly drew attention to gender inequality, putting women's issues at the centre of many political and public discourses. These developments created a welcoming and enthusiastic landscape for women's memoirs to inhabit; as interest in women's lives grew, so too did the demand for their unique accounts of historical events. Judith Tydor Baumel offers a similar explanation, arguing that two worldwide phenomena resulted in the greater publication of women's memoirs between the 1970s and the mid-1990s: 'the growing interest in issues pertaining to the Holocaust and the academic development of women's and family studies.'[74]

Some of the canonical women's accounts to arise in this period are the diaries of Etty Hillesum and Janina Bauman, the latter of which uniquely combines post-war testimony and ghetto/hiding diary, as well as the memoirs of women who were children

[74] Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*, p. 46.

or young teenagers during the Holocaust. These include those by Livia E. Bitton Jackson, Fanya Gottesfeld Heller, Alicia Appleman-Jurman, Rena Kornreich Gelissen, Kitty Hart-Moxon, Eva Tichauer, Trude Levi and Eva Schloss, the posthumous stepsister of Anne Frank, who went on to publish two further memoirs. The testimony of French Jewish musician Fania Fénelon, which was turned into a CBS television film in 1980, and the memoirs of Polish Jew Sara Nomberg-Przytyk and Moravian Jew Ruth Elias, have also been widely read. Ruth Klüger's well-known testimony, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, was also published in German in 1992 under the title *Weiter Leben: Eine Jugend*. It was extended and rereleased in 2001 under the title *Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*. Some Jewish women's testimonies published between the 1970s and the mid-1990s remain in relative obscurity, and have not shared the public reach, critical attention, or prominence that those authored by their Jewish male counterparts achieved. These include accounts by Bertha Ferderber-Salz, Lucille Eichengreen, Helen Lewis, Judith Magyar Isaacson, Isabella Leitner, Sara Zyskind and Gena Turgel, as well as that of Dutch Christian watchmaker and Nazi opponent Corrie Ten Boom.

Many of these memoirs were written in English by authors situated in the USA or the UK. Rena Kornreich Gelissen, for example, authored her account in English with Heather Dune Macadam from North Carolina, where she emigrated after the war. Helen Lewis, who created a life in Belfast with her husband in 1947, working as a dancer and choreographer, wrote her memoir in English from Northern Ireland. Janina Bauman, a Polish journalist and survivor of the Warsaw ghetto, emigrated to Leeds in 1971 after time spent living in both Poland and Israel. She wrote her testimony in English in Leeds after retirement in the late 1970s. Those who did not write in English, and did not publish their memoirs initially in the Anglophone world or from predominantly English-speaking

countries, had their accounts translated into English relatively soon after publication for English and American readers. Though Fania Fénelon's memoir *Playing for Time* was first published in French under the title *Sursis pour l'Orchestre* in Paris in 1976, it was translated into English in 1977. Soon after, it was picked up by American television network, CBS. The original Polish typescript of Sara Nomberg-Przytyk's memoir, *Auschwitz: True Tales from a Grotesque Land*, was written in Poland long before its publication. Roslyn Hirsh notes in the translator's foreword of the book that the typescript was discovered in the Yad Vashem Archives by Eli Pfefferkorn and was dated 1966. Its initial translation and publication in the USA, funded by the American Philosophical Society, occurred in the 1980s. Likewise, though Ruth Klüger's memoir was originally published in Germany in 1992, it was translated into English in the USA less than ten years later, and published by the Feminist Press at The City University of New York.

iii. Historiography

In the decades since their publication, historians and scholars have shown remarkable interest in the women's testimonies produced between the 1970s and the mid-1990s, and have devoted a substantial corpus of literature to their collective and individual study. While some of this scholarship characterised the literature – or parts of it – with a degree of both accuracy and, to the extent that is possible, objectivity, other studies used selective reading to reinforce assumptions about gender that only truly began to be dismantled in the early 2000s. On the whole, scholars of women's testimonies working in the 1980s and 1990s generally agreed upon a categorisation of these memoirs that aligned them with the interests of women's studies and feminist scholarship.

Judith Tydor Baumel argues of women's testimonies published in this period that they:

> usually began with the outbreak of war, most later memoirs included a certain number of the authors' pre-war experiences. This expanded chronological framework usually stemmed from the authors' heightened sense of historical awareness. Consequently, the reader was not only provided with necessary background material, but was also introduced to Jewish women's culture during the inter-war period.[75]

This characterisation is generally evidenced by the literature. While Polish Jewish author Gena Turgel's 1987 memoir, *I Light a Candle*, opens with her birth in Poland in 1923, Ruth Elias's 1988 testimony begins with the story of her childhood in Ostrava, Moravia. She provides extensive detail about her family members and their occupations, and even includes black and white photographs of the house in which she was born. Likewise, Eva Schloss's 1992 testimony, *Eva's Story*, opens its narrative at the author's birth in Vienna in 1929. The reader is provided with family anecdotes and an account of how Schloss's parents met. Even those, such as Rena Kornreich Gelissen's testimony, that do not open prior to the outbreak of war, emphasise the authors' pre-war lives and relationships.

Building further upon Tydor Baumel's observations, I also note that the women's testimonies published during this time period tend to end their narratives long after liberation. This is because most of these accounts were written post-retirement, though there are some exceptions to this rule. While some finish their narratives as the author and their surviving family members rebuilt their lives in Europe, the USA, and Israel, some carry their narratives to the present in which they construct their accounts, or, if their memoir has been rereleased, to the time that has elapsed since initial publication. Ruth Klüger's testimony, for example, ends in Connecticut in 1955, after describing the author's emigration to New York, her admittance to the University of California, and her

[75] Ibid.

marriage. The epilogue to the 2004 paperback edition of her account, published in 2000, takes us even further into Klüger's later life, covering the 1980s and 1990s, and even her choice to chronicle her experiences so many years after the events described. Kitty Hart-Moxon too concludes the 2000 paperback edition of *Return to Auschwitz* in the year 2000, reflecting on her return visit to Auschwitz and the present of Holocaust memorialisation in the UK. This follows a detailed description of her post-Holocaust experiences – her marriage and the birth of her sons, the death of her mother – in the United Kingdom. Likewise, Helen Lewis dedicates some space to her post-Holocaust work as a choreographer and the growth of her family in the afterword of her memoir, while Hungarian Jewish survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Trude Levi, ends her narrative fifty years after liberation. This broad pattern is striking, for it reveals a wave of testimonies preoccupied with providing the reader a long (or longer) term narrative arc, of which the Holocaust is a disruptive central event. The tendency of these accounts to frame the Holocaust within the wider context of happy childhoods, and later, rebuilding and post-war achievement, speaks to their intended readership; their conformity to this narrative makes them 'safer,' and more palatable, for the post-war West, for it reinforces the notion that the Western world behaved honourably, extending a helping hand to Jewish survivors after the Holocaust.

Furthermore, Tydor Baumel also posits that:

> this group of memoirs was characterized by a comparative degree of modesty in sexual matters. Although they tended to be emotionally revealing, many of the later women's memoirs were reticent about physical intimacy among women and matters concerning female sexuality during the Holocaust. This contrasts sharply with literature written by female survivors in the 1940s and 1950s […].[76]

[76] Ibid.

This is certainly true. Many women writing at this time did not address sexuality and eroticism as candidly as their literary predecessors, and largely avoided detailed discussions of sexual relationships between internment centre prisoners altogether. Those who dedicate space in their memoirs to sexual relationships do so, for the most part, euphemistically. For instance, though both Sara Nomberg-Przytyk and Ruth Elias write of the same-sex relationships they claim to have witnessed occurring among prisoners in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Taucha labour camp barracks respectively, neither explicitly describe sex acts, but instead refer politely to women in the barracks who would 'comfort one another with caresses and physical closeness.'[77] In so doing, these authors depart from the precedent set by their predecessors, who wrote of sexuality, among other difficult topics, in a raw and forthright manner, opting instead for a greater level of subtlety. This development, I posit, was a result of the emergence of a normative Holocaust experience in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the development of acceptable narratives of survival and the notion of the purity of victimhood, to which the authors felt obligated to adhere (see Chapter 3).

Yet, many of these memoirs include reflections on the fear of, vulnerability to, and reality of rape and sexual violence. Early in her testimony, Rena Kornreich Gelissen, deported on the first transport of Jewish women to Auschwitz-Birkenau with her twin sister, Danka, in 1942, explains that, upon the Nazi invasion of Poland, '[n]ews spread rapidly through the neighbouring communities that several Jewish girls had been raped by German soldiers.'[78] This news, she suggests, created a sense of fear among young Jewish women about their vulnerability to rape by invading German soldiers. In the opening pages of her memoir, Polish survivor Gena Turgel, who spent time in Płaszów,

[77] Ruth Elias, *Triumph of Hope: From Theresienstadt and Auschwitz to Israel*, trans. by Margot Bettauer Dembo (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), p. 168.
[78] Rena Kornreich Gelissen, with Heather Dune Macadam, *Rena's Promise: A Story of Two Sisters in Auschwitz* (Boston: Orion Publishing Group, 1995), p. 41.

Auschwitz-Birkenau, Buchenwald, and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps, recalls that, as the same event occurred, her mother cautioned her to don old clothes and appear unattractive in order to avoid rape by German soldiers.[79] Likewise, and once incarcerated in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, Eva Schloss remembers that because work in Canada afforded her the privilege of regular showers, she was warned by older inmates 'to be very careful not to get caught by a German and pulled into a corner to be raped.'[80] In an especially extreme turn of events, Schloss claims, an SS officer began to follow her around the camp. Eventually, terrified that she might be raped, she recalls that she hid among a heap of old clothes until she was certain he had given up his search. These authors emphasise – without any apparent misgivings – not only the threat that they claim sexual violence posed in both ghettos and concentration camps in the Nazi-occupied territories, but to the fear and reality of falling victim to unwanted and potentially dangerous sexual attention. The recollection of the rape of Jewish women by Jewish men or other victim groups within the concentration camp setting is scarce in these memoirs; accounts of the fear and actuality of rape most often show Wehrmacht and SS soldiers to be the perpetrators.

Additionally, scholars have repeatedly characterised women's memoirs published between the 1970s and the mid-1990s as particularly concerned with depicting women's

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[79] Gena Turgel, with Veronica Groocock, *I Light a Candle* (London: Grafton Books, 1987), p. 19. Płaszów concentration camp was located in a southern suburb of Kraków in southern Poland. It was built on the grounds of two former Jewish cemeteries and its prisoners, who were largely Jewish, were made to participate in forced labour. Buchenwald concentration camp was established in central Germany in 1937, and its prisoners included Jews, homosexuals, Roma and Sinti gyspies, political prisoners and Poles and Slavs, among others. It was one of the Third Reich's largest concentration camps. Many died at Buchenwald through forced labour and exhaustion, disease, and shooting. Bergen-Belsen concentration camp was located in northern Germany and found in 1943, though it had initially been established as a prisoner of war camp.

[80] Eva Schloss, with Evelyn Julia Kent, *Eva's Story: A Survivor's Tale by the Step Sister of Anne Frank* (Middlesex: Castle-Kent, 2001), p. 100. Nicknamed 'Canada' because it was a place of abundance, this Auschwitz-Birkenau warehouse was where the belongings of transported persons were organised. Prisoners who worked in Canada were considered particularly privileged both because they worked indoors and because they had the opportunity to take sought after items, such as underwear, soap and toothbrushes. Such objects could be used or traded for food.

mutual aid groups, surrogate families and friendships, and women's reliance upon one another for survival in internment centres. Tydor Baumel is not alone, therefore, in her summary of these testimonies as emphasising 'unique female experiences during the Holocaust,' such as those pertaining to normative gender roles, nor in her suggestion that almost all authors writing at this time 'cited women's assistance as a primary factor in their survival.'[81] Writing more generally about women's memoirs, Lillian Kremer concurs, stressing that these accounts focus on women's 'remarkable capacity to create substitute families after the loss of loved ones,' the 'manner in which female cooperation and interdependence contributed to survival,' and 'motherhood.'[82] In a later essay that offers a comparative analysis of survivor testimony and fictional representations of the Holocaust, Kremer once again returns to these tropes, claiming that women's 'mutual support' and the 'generosity of friends' have been such recurrent patterns of imagery in women's memoirs that they have since been mirrored in the stories of fictional female survivors, such as that of Anya in Susan Fromberg Schaeffer's novel of the same name.[83]

Many women's memoirs published during this period support these claims, with their authors portraying supportive networks created by surrogate families and strong friendships in various Nazi institutions. In her 1981 memoir, for instance, Kitty Hart-Moxon explains that some women prisoners within Auschwitz-Birkenau formed little families, and claims that there was a type of instinctual 'bonding among the women similar to that found in the animal kingdom.'[84] She also feels it important to introduce the reader to her own camp family members, whose names, we discover, were Isa, Jola and Ruda. Comparable claims are made by Livia E. Bitton Jackson, born Elli L. Friedman in

[81] Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*, p. 46.
[82] Kremer, *Women's Holocaust Writing*, p. 18; Ibid., p. 4.
[83] S. Lillian Kremer, 'Women in the Holocaust: Representation of Gendered Suffering and Coping Strategies in American Fiction', in *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust*, ed. by Baer and Goldenberg, pp. 260 – 277, (p. 268).
[84] Hart-Moxon, *Return to Auschwitz*, p. 70.

Czechoslovakia and deported at the age of 13 to Auschwitz-Birkenau with her mother. She recalls that herself, her mother, aunt and cousins, Suri and Hindi, who met one another in the camp, 'vow never to be separated from each other.'[85] Likewise, Sara Zyskind, a Polish Jew deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, and later to Mittelstein and Grafenfort concentration camps, describes a similar pledge made in Auschwitz.[86] On arrival, she claims, she and Surtcha, a friend from Poland, spotted a young girl in the camp who had lost her sister and told her, '"Surtcha and I will be your sisters. Let's try and keep together."'[87]

Rena Kornreich Gelissen and Isabella Leitner also depict vows of togetherness in their memoirs, claiming that they swore to remain unseparated from the sisters with whom they were deported; much space in their testimonies is dedicated to these relationships. The title of Kornreich Gelissen's memoir, *Rena's Promise: A Story of Two Sisters in Auschwitz*, frames the account as one based on the collective experiences of the sisters. Certainly, and in stark contrast with women's memoirs published in the immediate post-war years, the practice of forming protective surrogate families or remaining close to existing family members is generally a notable theme of these testimonies. This trend was likely informed by women's memoirs of the 1950s and 1960s, which first began to dedicate minimal space to such relationships, and thus set a precedent to be followed and built upon by those writing later. The increasingly preferential representation of women's bonds in critical literature was also a probable influential factor. Additionally, given that by the time these memoirs were published a minimum of 35 years had lapsed between liberation and publication, we might expect this focus on strong women's bonds to speak

[85] Livia E. Bitton Jackson, *Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust* (London: Panther Books, 1984), p. 89.
[86] Mittelstein concentration camp was an all-female subcamp of Gross-Rosen concentration camp, and was located in south west Poland. It was a relatively small camp whose inmates, largely Jewish women from Poland and Hungary, carried out forced labour. Grafenfort concentration camp was the name given to three separate forced labour camps in the village of Grafenfort in south west Poland.
[87] Sara Zyskind, *Stolen Years* (New York: Lerner Publications Company, 1981), p. 156.

to the authors' growing concerns with presenting themselves and their companions as absolute victims, to the construction of their own acceptable survivor identities. This too goes some way to explaining why this trend continues, and is furthered, in the next wave of women's memoirs.

Writing in 2007 and drawing on Lawrence Thomas, Erica Bouris argues that the 'ideal victim' has an identity structured upon 'innocence, purity, moral superiority, and a lack of responsibility.'[88] The endurance of this 'constellation' of victim characteristics, she posits, can be attributed to the fact that they help us, as readers, 'recognize her [the victim], and they help us to fill in answers to her character, and importantly, whether she is worthy of our attention and response.'[89] It is thus unsurprising that as women memoirists increasingly produced their accounts for a Western, mass market readership, as opposed to a localised community of European survivors, nurturance and caretaking became more central themes. Yet while the closeness of both surrogate and natural families and strong filial bonds are certainly a feature of many women's memoirs of this period, and particularly those of women who were deported with female family members, their prominence has been overemphasised by much scholarship. Some of these testimonies, in fact, dedicate equal space to the depiction of hostilities, violence, deceit and difficult relationships among women prisoners. Yet this element of women's accounts produced between the 1970s and the mid-1990s remains understudied and underrepresented. This is further discussed in Chapter 2.

With regards to the 'unique female experiences' to which Tydor Baumel and Kremer, among others, draw attention, some women's memoirs published in this time period follow, and build upon, the tradition set by their earlier testimonial counterparts,

[88] Erica Bouris, *Complex Political Victims* (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, 2007), p. 48.
[89] Ibid.

focusing upon these experiences. Among the most commonly referenced are those pertaining to women's bodies, such as motherhood, pregnancy and childbirth, gynaecological examinations, menstruation and amenorrhea, and concerns about sterility. Hungarian Jew Isabella Leitner, who was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with her family on her 23rd birthday, and Rena Kornreich Gelissen, discuss the difficulties that menstruation presented to many women prisoners in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Kornreich Gelissen, for example, documents the anguish of searching for some form of sanitary product within the camp:

> I have my period. […] I look for something to use, but there are no rags or sanitary napkins, only small squares of newspaper. […] I scour the ground looking for anything that might help me hinder the flow. There is nothing. […] I take a few squares of newsprint. […] I spend the day completely self-conscious, afraid of what getting my period means in this place. […] Dealing with this curse means praying it will go away quickly and never return.[90]

Kornreich Gelissen too details escaping a violent gynaecological examination upon arrival at Auschwitz, carried out with such force, she claims, that the woman ahead of her in line bled profusely.[91] Unusually, Ruth Elias, deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau from the Theresienstadt ghetto in 1943 while pregnant, even writes in great detail about her own pregnancy and the birth and death of her daughter in the camp. She dedicates ten pages to the incident, eventually explaining that both mother and child, or child alone, would have to die, and so, with much anguish, she chose infanticide in order to save her own life: 'I did it. I killed my own child. […] I want to go with you, my child. I do not want to live. How can I possibly go on living with this burden of guilt?'[92]

Finally, Tydor Baumel observes that women's memoirs published between the 1970s and the mid-1990s are particularly emotionally revealing. This characterisation is

[90] Kornreich Gelissen, *Rena's Promise*, p. 81.
[91] Ibid., p. 64.
[92] Elias, *Triumph of Hope*, p. 151.

generally accurate, though all of the women's accounts published since the end of the Second World War could be described as such, regardless of the stylistic approaches to retelling that their authors take. Isabella Leitner's 1978 testimony, *Fragments of Isabella*, is overtly literary, and in a manner akin to the memoirs of Charlotte Delbo and Giuliana Tedeschi, uses post-modernist fragmentation, a nonlinear narrative and temporal distortion to provide the reader an insight into the author's emotions, the form of her memoir reflecting the trauma of her experiences. The use of poetic language too conveys Leitner's pain at the loss of her mother, who was condemned to death upon arrival at the camp:

> I crave so a small piece of earth, a testimony that I too had a mother, that this planet is mine too, so that the salt of my tears on that little mound might make me part of the whole scheme of things.
>
> The smoke has vanished, and only I remember it. And nothing marks that noble mother but my heart.[93]

On the other hand, Palestinian-born Victoria Ancona-Vincent uses precise and clear-cut language to express her feelings in her 1995 testimony. For example, when describing the cattle car journey from Milan to Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which she was deported in May 1944 for her work with the resistance movement, she writes that 'it was humiliating in the extreme,' and of the process of being stripped and searched on arrival, she explains that she 'felt very ashamed.'[94] Though distinct in literary style, the memoirs of both Leitner and Ancona-Vincent can be classified as emotionally revealing. Interestingly, Ancona-Vincent explains in her memoir's acknowledgements that 'my testimony has been written to the best of my recollection. I have tried to ensure its accuracy by carefully checking dates […] I have kept my text concise and have avoided elaborate descriptive

[93] Isabella Leitner, *Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz*, ed. by Irving A. Leitner (London: New English Library, 1980), p. 19.
[94] Victoria Ancona-Vincent, *Beyond Imagination*, ed. by Stephen D. Smith (Nottinghamshire: Quill Press, 2004), pp. 21 – 24.

details.'[95] By here associating factual accuracy with linguistic choice, Ancona-Vincent draws attention to her concerns about the reliability of her own memory. This is a somewhat common feature of women's memoirs published in this era, which were often written decades after the events described.

Overall, these testimonies were largely written in the UK or the USA in English, and were published for audiences of the post-war West. Those that were not, such as that of Fania Fénelon, were translated almost immediately into English for an Anglophone – predominantly American – readership. Most of the women's accounts published during this time period open and close their narratives long before and after the events of the Holocaust. These patterns, which signal an alteration in the intended readership for memoirs produced at this time, are also mirrored in the changing thematic focus of the texts. To a greater extent than their predecessors, the women's testimonies published between the 1970s and the mid-1990s dedicate considerable space to women's bonds, supportive relationships, and unique experiences, developing and furthering the established literary traditions of the previous wave of women's accounts. This focus speaks not only to an increasingly Western readership – which would be more receptive to tales of bravery, solidarity, sisterhood and humanity as emerging from the Holocaust, rather than those of destruction – but to altering popular and scholarly discourses on the Holocaust and a growing interest in women's history. Furthermore, this trend reflects the fact that these particular memoirists, publishing in these decades, had had time since the Holocaust to grapple with their traumatic histories, and to construct considered narratives of both experience and personal identity. These authors also diverge from the patterns set by the earliest women's testimonies – those of the 1940s and 1950s – writing more openly about the threat and reality of sexual violence and rape, but less frequently and candidly

[95] Ibid., p. xiv.

about sexuality and eroticism between concentration camp prisoners. This too signals the changing face of Holocaust remembrance in this time period, and indicates that these authors were writing for a Western audience, rather than a localised community of Holocaust survivors.

IV. The late 1990s – 2020

i. Representations of the Holocaust in High Demand

Holocaust memoir consumption and publication, as well as popular representations of the event in film, television, theatre, memoirs, and historical fiction, reached its peak in the post-war West between the late 1990s and 2020, following a steady growth in public interest in the Holocaust since the 1940s. Consequently, Leigh Gilmore deems these years 'the height of the memoir boom,' labelling the era as 'the age of memoir and trauma.' [96] After the global success of *Schindler's List* in 1994, 1997 saw the release of Italian comedy-drama, *Life is Beautiful*, followed by *The Pianist* in 2002. Though neither achieved the critical acclaim of *Schindler's List*, both were popular, with *The Pianist* winning multiple Oscars. Television adaptations of the story of Anne Frank also emerged, following the release of numerous films and miniseries about the Frank family in the 1980s. In 2001, a two-part miniseries entitled *Anne Frank: The Whole Story* was aired on ABC in the USA. It won multiple awards and accolades, including an Emmy. In 2009, the BBC's adaptation of the story of Anne Frank was aired in Britain. It was then broadcast in the United States in April 2010. In 2009 popular film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, a screen adaptation of John Boyne's children's novel, was released, and there

[96] Leigh Gilmore, 'Jurisdictions: I, Rigoberta Menchú, The Kiss, and Scandalous Self-Representation in the Age of Memoir and Trauma,' *Signs*, 28:2 (Winter, 2003), 695 – 718 (p. 695).

was a surge in Auschwitz-centred fiction published, including such titles as *The Boy who Followed his Father into Auschwitz* (2018), *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (2018) and its sequel *Cilka's Journey* (2019). This illustrates not only the continued popularity of Holocaust representations well into the twenty-first century, but the competing popular demand for filmic and fictional depictions of the event. These representations also indicate the development of what Norman Finkelstein dubs the "Holocaust industry," a means by which the Holocaust is marketed, packaged and sold to consumers. In his book *Selling the Holocaust*, Tim Cole explains – and criticises – this increased public interest in sanitised and glorified portrayals of the Holocaust, fearing that such representations distort the realities of the event itself:

> In the 1960s and 1970s there was considerable interest in the events of the Holocaust – hence [Elie] Wiesel's rise to prominence. In the 1990s, it is not the events but the *representation* of those events that has triggered interest – hence Spielberg's dominance. A movie like *Schindler's List* has assumed a life of its own apart from the Holocaust.[97]

He goes on to note that:

> [T]here remains a tendency for redemptive figures like Anne Frank to provide the discourse by which the Holocaust is viewed. The late 1990s rash of 'Holocaust' movies not only perpetuates that, but takes it to even greater lengths. […] [S]uch attempts at redemption are not only inappropriate, but potentially dangerous. Swallowing a sugar-coated 'Holocaust' may be little more than swallowing a placebo.[98]

Yet despite the evident surge in demand for fictional or fictionalised depictions of the Holocaust, in 'sugar-coated' Hollywood stories of the triumph of hope and love over evil, consumers also maintained – and continue to maintain – a fascination with the reality of the event and a desire for identification with its victims. This is evidenced, firstly, in the boom of 'dark tourism' at sites of Nazi atrocity, former ghettos and even Jewish hiding

[97] Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History is Bought, Sold, and Packaged* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. xii.
[98] Ibid., p. xviii.

places, a phenomenon that Malcom Foley and J. John Lennon describe as the manner 'in which death, disaster and atrocity are being handled by those who offer associated tourism "products."'[99] The Auschwitz museum, for instance, is located on the grounds of Auschwitz I near the Polish town of Kraków. It features displays of victims' hair, glasses, and shoes, among other personal items, and offers guided tours of both the Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II complexes. The number of visitors to the sites dramatically increased at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The museum's website claims that:

> For several decades the former camp was visited annually by approximately 500-600 thousand people; from the beginning of the 21st century that number began to grow. More than a million people from all over the world visit the Museum annually since 2007. The highest number of visitors was registered in 2014, when more than 1.5 million people visited Auschwitz.[100]

The Anne Frank House, on the other hand, a museum located on Amsterdam's Prinsengracht in the house that Anne and her family inhabited while in hiding during the Second World War, and which offers visitors a tour of the family's living quarters, claims to receive over 1.2 million visitors every year, reaching peak numbers in 2013.[101] Holocaust memorials and museums also experienced enduring popularity with visitors during this era. Since its opening in 1993, for example, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum claims to have welcomed more than 40 million visitors, making it one of the most visited tourist attractions in the United States.[102]

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[99] J. John Lennon and Malcom Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Thomson, 2006), p. 3. For more theory on this phenomenon see also: John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011); Chris Rojek, *Ways of Escape* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone, eds., *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2009).

[100] Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, 'Visitors to the Auschwitz Site', <http://70.auschwitz.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=82&Itemid=173&lang=en> [accessed 03/11/2019]

[101] Anne Frank House, 'Anne Frank House: Annual Report 2018', <https://annefrank.freetls.fastly.net/media/filer_public/7c/55/7c553788-3c18-45e9-aa09-3358d3e3bf95/afh_annualreport_2018.pdf> [accessed 03/11/2019], p. 6.

[102] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'About the Museum: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust', <https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum> [accessed 03/11/2019]

This public fascination with the Holocaust and the growing desire for understanding through connection with its victims also manifested itself in the rising demand for memoirs written by survivors. Many Holocaust survivors answered this call, producing and publishing their memoirs in abundance; hence Louise O. Vasvári's assertion that in this period 'a boom' in 'Holocaust life writing' truly occurred.[103] Others published their testimonies at this time in response to the Holocaust's increasing centrality in political discourses in the Western world. After all, 2001 saw the UK institute Holocaust Memorial Day, an annual nationwide day of Holocaust learning and remembrance, and in 2005 the United Nations voted to formally commemorate the Holocaust. Survivor memoirs and even public addresses were therefore enthusiastically welcomed as memorialisation took on an ever more important role in Western politics. Some memoirists, such as Breslau-born Jew Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, were in fact prompted to tell their stories publicly by television and radio broadcasting bodies, who in turn were keen to capitalise on the growing global demand for commemoration and memorialisation of the Holocaust's victims. Lasker-Wallfisch's testimony, *Inherit the Truth*, was, as its title suggests, 'originally intended to be for immediate family use only,' a document for her children and grandchildren to learn about her personal experiences as a Jew in Nazi-occupied Europe.[104] Her account was, however, published in English in 1996 as a result of a BBC interview, from which also came a televised broadcast.

Many survivors also chose to publish their accounts in these years in anticipation of their own deaths, and those of the entire remaining first-generation survivor community, in order to preserve the memory of the Holocaust for future generations.

[103] Louise O. Vasvári, 'Introduction to and Bibliography of the Central European Women's Holocaust Life Writing in English', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture (Library)*, 11:1 (2009), 1 – 13 (p. 3).
[104] Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth: 1939 – 1945*, preface by Martin Gilbert (London: dlm, 1996), p. 9.

Philip Zimbardo acknowledges this fact in his foreword to Hungarian Jewish survivor Edith Eger's 2017 memoir, *The Choice: Embrace the Possible*. He explains that her testimony provides valuable insights into the Holocaust, and is particularly important because there are 'dwindling numbers of survivors who can bear first-hand testimony to the horrors of the concentration camps.'[105] Likewise, in the foreword to Czechoslovakian-born Jewish survivor Olga Horak's memoir, Paul O'Shea writes:

> The witnesses to the Shoah are growing older and, as that happens, our link with the events of that period of human history grow tenuous. It is important therefore to record and remember, not only for the sake of generations to come, but in order to create as complete a history as possible.[106]

Like many of their predecessors, the women who produced and published their memoirs during this period hoped to testify to the destruction of the Holocaust and preserve the memory of those murdered while they were still able to do so.

ii. Women's Memoirs

This final of wave of women's memoirs, published between the late 1990s and 2020, is comparatively small, precisely because so many survivors had passed away by the dawn of this present century. The testimonies published include those by Greek and Czechoslovakian-born Jews Erika Kounio Amariglio and Olga Horak, both of which were released originally in English. Eva Schloss produced two English testimonies in this period, one in 2006 and the other in 2013. Others include English accounts by Sara Tuvel Bernstein (1997) Olga Bleier (2013), Hadassah Rosensaft (published in Israel in English in 2005), and German cellist Anita Lasker-Wallfisch. Geneviève de Gaulle Anthonioz, a

[105] Edith Eger, with Esmé Schwall Weigand, *The Choice*, foreword by Philip Zimbardo (London: Rider, 2017), p. xiv.
[106] Paul O'Shea, 'Foreword' in Olga Horak, *Auschwitz to Australia: A Holocaust Survivor's Memoir* (East Roseville: Kangaroo Press, 2000), pp. xi – xii (p. xi).

French Christian resistance worker and the niece of General Charles de Gaulle, also published her memoir in French in 1998 and in English in 1999.

Livia E. Bitton Jackson released *My Bridges of Hope* in 1999, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust* (a rereleased, edited edition of her 1980 memoir) in 1997, and *Saving What Remains: A Holocaust Survivor's Journey Home to Reclaim her Ancestry* in 2007. The latter exclusively details the author's post-Holocaust life. Halina Birenbaum's 1967 memoir, *Hope is the Last to Die: A Personal Documentation of Nazi Terror*, was also rereleased in 1996 under the revised title, *Hope is the Last to Die: A Coming of Age Under Nazi Terror*. Interestingly, while the concept of hope still remained central to these testimonies' titles, the alterations suggest that girlhood, innocence, and childhood interrupted, as opposed to the authors' individual struggles, became increasingly marketable in the late 1990s.

One of the most recent women's Holocaust memoirs to be published is Edith Eger's 2017 English account, *The Choice*, which garnered attention from the BBC and led to a television interview with Oprah Winfrey in 2019. The memoir reads as part Holocaust account, part self-help guide. Eger recounts her experiences in Auschwitz-Birkenau, as well as her post-Holocaust life and work as a psychologist, aiming to convince readers that freedom can be achieved only when we confront our own suffering. *Renia's Diary: A Young Girl's Life in the Shadow of the Holocaust*, was also published in English in 2019. This diary was released after remaining undiscovered for 70 years, and long after the death of its author, Renia Spiegel. It focuses on Spiegel's experience of finding love during the Holocaust. Its final entry is written by her wartime love interest, Zygmunt. These most recent memoirs and diaries, premised on the triumph of hope, innocence and love, illustrate that Tim Cole's observation that redemptive stories of the Holocaust are among the most popular continues to ring true.

iii. Historiography

Unlike the women's testimonies published in the preceding decades, those published between the mid-1990s and 2020, and particularly the most recently published among them, feature rarely in critical literature and Holocaust discourses, and have come under comparatively little scholarly scrutiny as a collective. Consequently, no generally agreed upon consensus about their characteristics has been established in historiography. This is likely because this wave of testimonies is relatively slender and therefore difficult to study collectively, and because so much critical literature dedicated to earlier waves of testimony, and to survivor memoirs in general, has already amassed. I argue, however, that these memoirs are shaped, to a greater extent than their predecessors, by the combined forces of popular representations of the Holocaust (particularly those framed with a universal or redemptive message), scholarly, testimonial and political discourses on the Holocaust, and most notably, the authors' post-Holocaust lives and experiences.

In a 2009 article for the Jewish Women's Archive, Sarah R. Horowitz offers a similar description of these accounts, noting that:

> the final wave of women's memoirs, written at the close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, are […] shaped by the half-century since the end of the war – by the culture in which the writer has lived, her relationships and experiences since that time – and by a re-evaluation of how she has come to understand her past. Some of these later memoirs are marked by a belated despair, which hits the writer after decades of seeming adjustment to life after the Holocaust.[107]

This is certainly evidenced by the literature, and is notable in many authors' explicit descriptions of the long-term impact of their Holocaust experiences.

[107] Sarah R. Horowitz, 'Holocaust Literature', *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women's Archive (2009), <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/holocaust-literature> [accessed 07/03/2019]

Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, a former member of the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz deported to the camp in 1943, acknowledges this in the introduction to her memoir, explaining that life after the Holocaust was shaped by her experiences of the event, that, to use her words, 'what you have seen and what you have gone through, those experiences become an integral part of you, and they inevitably colour your whole make-up.'[108] This enduring impact is also evident in the notable space dedicated in these memoirs to the authors' post-Holocaust lives, or to cite Vasvári, in the writers' need 'to recount life after' the Holocaust.[109] This is unsurprising given the length of time that had passed between the experiences retold and the act of retelling itself; unlike earlier authors, these memoirists had the ability to determine and recount the consequences the Holocaust had on their post-war lives, and include this in their accounts as further testament to the horrors they suffered.

The third published account of Eva Schloss, who was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau from Holland with her family in May 1944, for example, aptly titled *After Auschwitz*, is dedicated in its entirety to the years following the Holocaust and the author's post-war life. Edith Eger likewise lends over half of her memoir to her life after 1945, paying particular attention to coping with trauma and the difficulty of integrating into society in the United States. Her narrative ends in the summer of 2010 as she presented a lecture about trauma to a US Army unit in Colorado. Eger's story and the manner in which she retells it appear to be heavily influenced by her work as a psychologist, approaches from which she deploys to create a hopeful and motivational account about both her traumatic experiences and her process of recovery. She went on

[108] Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth*, p. 15.
[109] Vasvári, 'Introduction to and Bibliography', *CLCWeb*, p. 3.

to release a self-help guide to healing after trauma, inspired by her Holocaust experiences, in September 2020, entitled *The Gift: 12 Lessons to Save your Life*.

Moreover, these memoirs are strikingly informed by earlier waves of women's testimonies (and the normative standards of memoir they helped shape) with which they are in dialogue. In a rather circuitous fashion, for instance, many women publishing their testimonies during this time period return to and draw upon the candidness of those published in the immediate post-war years, often writing honestly about upsetting or taboo topics. Further inspired by testimonies that emerged in the immediate post-war years and those that came later, between the 1970s and the mid-1990s, these memoirs also frequently address the threat and reality of rape, sexual violence, unwanted sexual attention, sexual humiliation, and sexual barter, not only as perpetrated by Wehrmacht and SS soldiers, but also by Russian and even American liberating soldiers. Sarah Horowitz also notices this general forthrightness, claiming that 'belated memoirs […] focus on events which [the writers] dared not discuss earlier, out of shame or consideration for others,' and thus, she suggests, they give a less 'beautified', in the words of Tydor Baumel, account of experiences left out of those published in the 1960s and 1970s.[110]

Both Erika Kounio Amariglio and Olga Horak, for example, write of Russian soldiers 'who raped any female they happened across – even old women were not spared' or who traded goods for sexual favours from young Jewish women as the war neared its end.[111] Edith Eger documents being very nearly raped by one of the American GIs who

[110] Horowitz, 'Holocaust Literature', *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women's Archive (2009), <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/holocaust-literature> [accessed 07/072019]
[111] Erika Kounio Amariglio, *From Thessaloniki to Auschwitz and Back: Memories of a Survivor from Thessaloniki*, trans. by Theresa Sundt (London: Vallentine Mitchel, 2000), p. 133.

liberated her from a subcamp of Mauthausen. The passage is difficult to read. Eger's fear, even in the retelling of experience, is palpable:

> rough handling could do more than tarnish me, it could kill me. I am that brittle. […] He comes at me, cooing absurdly, his voice grainy, dislocated. […] I have to keep him away from me. There is nothing to throw. I can't even sit. I try to scream, but my voice is just a warble. […] He will use me. Crush me.[112]

Eger also writes of her terror as she stood naked in the shower of Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which she was deported as a teenager in 1944, faced with, she claims, Joseph Mengele unbuttoning his coat; the implication is that her fear stemmed from the belief that she could be the victim of rape or sexual violence, though she does not explicitly acknowledge this.[113] Despite this, however, discussions of sexual and romantic relationships between concentration or forced labour camp prisoners in these testimonies are rare; such relationships have evidently become an increasingly undesirable theme in women's memoirs since the 1940s and 1950s when they were most candidly discussed.

A testimonial discourse is also evident in the tendency of these accounts to emulate their immediate predecessors, emphasising women's maintained familial bonds in concentration camps, as well the formation of supportive surrogate families and friendship groups. Edith Eger and Olga Horak, for instance, both document a dedication to remain with their female family members in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Eger was deported with her family and, after her mother was condemned to death in the gas chamber, found herself alone in the camp with her sister Magda. She lends multiple extensive passages to her sisterly devotion to Magda, claiming: 'I will survive if my sister is there. I will survive by attaching myself to her as though I am her shadow.'[114] Later, she goes as far as to suggest that devotion to another person was the only means of survival in the camp;

[112] Eger, *The Choice*, p. 98.
[113] Ibid., p. 59.
[114] Ibid., p. 48.

competition and isolation would lead, she contends, only to destruction. She writes: 'to survive is to transcend your own needs and commit yourself to someone or something outside yourself. For me that someone is Magda…'[115] Likewise, though Olga Horak makes no mention of friendships made during her incarceration at Auschwitz-Birkenau, she writes of the strength she elicited from her mother and her cousins Trude and Lilly, who were in a different work group.

Hadassah Rosensaft, survivor of Ravensbrück Geneviève de Gaulle Anthonioz, and Anita Lasker-Wallfisch also dedicate notable space in their accounts to friendships formed with other women during their incarcerations. Hadassah Rosensaft was a Polish Jew imprisoned in both Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen, where she famously kept 149 Jewish children alive between 1944 until the camp's liberation in April 1945 through offering medical aid. Though she was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with her sister Rozka, who was killed in the camp, she does not document being inseparable from or reliant upon her during her imprisonment, as many other women do. She does, however, recall a good friendship with Lonia, a pharmacist from Warsaw, with whom, she claims, she had a mutually nurturing relationship as colleagues in the camp infirmary:

> One day I became sick. Lonia took care of me, keeping me in her bed. When I started to recover, she came down with the same disease, and naturally, I took care of her. She insisted that the same louse made both of us ill, and that we were therefore related through a louse.[116]

De Gaulle Anthonioz similarly writes of friends in Ravensbrück who celebrated her birthday, selflessly pooling ingredients to make her a birthday cake. We learn that their names were Danielle, Grete, Milena, Germaine and Jacqueline, and that their 'sisterly

[115] Ibid., p. 54.
[116] Hadassah Rosensaft, *Yesterday: My Story*, intro. by Elie Wiesel (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), p. 33.

affection,' according to de Gaulle Anthonioz, 'kept me going.'[117] Lasker-Wallfisch too frequently recalls the friendships she fostered at Auschwitz-Birkenau, crediting them, in many instances, with her survival: 'being together transformed things for us. It gave us an added incentive to survive, for each other.'[118] Though they are present, and are particularly noted by Kounio Amariglio, depictions of hostilities among women in concentration camps are generally rare in these accounts, unlike in the previous waves of women's memoirs.

In summary, these testimonies were largely written and published in English in the UK and the USA. Though Olga Horak's testimony was published in Australia, those by Eva Schloss, Edith Eger, and Anita Lasker-Wallfisch were all produced for English and American readerships. While Geneviève de Gaulle Anthonioz's account was published in French in 1998, it was translated into English for an English audience only one year later. These memoirs are directly comparable to those produced between the 1970s and the mid-1990s; both waves of memoir tend to feature the Holocaust as a disruptive, central event, bookended by generally happy childhoods in Europe and post-Holocaust lives of contentment and achievement in the USA, the UK, Israel or Australia. Many of these testimonies end their narratives long after the war, while others bring the reader to the writer's present, to the time in which they constructed their narratives.

These testimonies also tend to follow the traditions set by the previous two waves of women's Holocaust memoirs, their thematic focus on familial bonds, friendships, and sexual violence (though importantly, not sexuality and eroticism) echoing that of their most recent predecessors. Furthermore, these memoirs can typically be characterised by their redemptive and hopeful tone, and are often marketed as tales of sisterhood, hope,

[117] Geneviève De Gaulle Anthonioz, *God Remained Outside: An Echo of Ravensbrück*, trans. by Margaret Crosland (London: Souvenir Press, 1999), p. 4.
[118] Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth*, p. 80.

strength and meaning borne of destruction, much like some of the enduring testimonies of both men and women published in the 1940s and 1950s. These testimonial discourses, and the literary traditions they have helped to create, point to the increasingly Western, English-speaking audience for Holocaust survivor accounts, which has in turn shaped the form, style and content of the memoirs themselves. The women's testimonies published in English between the late-1990s and 2020, generally texts which amalgamate varying elements of the multiple waves of women's memoirs to come before, are perhaps the blueprint upon which future women's (and even men's) testimonies will be modelled.

V. The Present and the Future of Holocaust Testimony

Contemporarily, demand for literary representations of the Holocaust remains high. Biographies of Holocaust victims are well-liked by the reading public, particularly in Europe and the USA, and are increasingly produced in-lieu of new testimonies written by living survivors. Accounts of the lives of parents and grandparents authored by second and third generation survivors, and monographs and diaries based on previously unseen documents, also continue to be published and enthusiastically consumed by a mass market readership. In 2020 alone many biographical – in some cases, loosely biographical – texts have been produced, including *The Sisters of Auschwitz: The True story of Two Jewish Sisters' Resistance in the Heart of Nazi Territory*, *House of Glass: The Story and Secrets of a Twentieth-Century Jewish Family*, *When Time Stopped: A Memoir of My Father's War and What Remains*, and *The Photographer at Sixteen*, among others. This trend in publishing illustrates not only, in the case of biographies written by the ancestors of survivors, an enduring need to remember the experiences of family members and

grapple with traumatic family histories, but a continued public interest in the Holocaust, and a compulsion to identify with its victims, over 70 years after the event.

Despite their scarcity (a result of the ever-diminishing size of the global survivor community), newly published testimonies, as well as canonical survivor literature, are also in demand, while Holocaust fiction – or fictionalised Holocaust stories claiming to be based on true stories – becomes progressively more popular. Both authentic Holocaust testimonies and historical fiction published in the present or the imminent future, can largely be characterised by a thematic insistence upon love, resistance, and hope. Often premised on redemptive messages and universal lessons, these texts echo – and replicate – the sanguinity of some of the earliest and most canonical memoirs and diaries, among them those by Anne Frank and Viktor Frankl. Indeed, the Holocaust stories – both fictionalised and testimonial – that serve to teach modern-day readers lessons about courage, forgiveness and the human spirit, continue not only to endure, but to be the most marketable. Many titles of Holocaust fiction of this kind, such as *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* and its sequel *Cilka's Journey*, have quickly become bestsellers, translated into multiple languages and are set to be produced as high-end drama series or films. To a degree, in fact, fictionalised representations of the Holocaust are arguably eclipsing, and taking precedence over, accounts authored by those with first-hand experience of the event.[119]

The implications of this phenomenon – the pervasive popularity of Holocaust fiction – in present-day Holocaust remembrance is marked; Holocaust fiction has become so ubiquitous in the Anglophone world, and indeed, on a global scale, that it is

[119] Jeffrey Shandler observed a similar shift in the 1990s, anticipating the increased prominence of fictionalised representations of the Holocaust. He suggests that after the production of *Shindler's List*, Steven Spielberg's position as a spokesperson for the Holocaust eclipsed that of survivors like Elie Wiesel. He argued that this was telling of 'a larger shift in Holocaust remembrance from its focus on survivors to a new center of attention: the creators of Holocaust mediations.'Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 253.

increasingly synonymous in public Holocaust awareness with the Holocaust itself. Popular representations of the Holocaust have even begun to inform the manner in which Holocaust testimony is created and marketed. This can be seen in a comparative study of the dust jackets and cover artwork of contemporary Holocaust literature, which demonstrates how memoirists (or their publishers) are now imitating their fashionable, fictionalised counterparts in a bid to capitalise on their popularity and maintain public interest in survivor accounts.

There are numerous editions, for instance, of John Boyne's 2006 historical fiction novel, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the cover artwork for which has undergone a noticeable evolution since its initial publication. As illustrated in Figure 1, the 2006 English edition of the book, published by David Fickling Books, features the title in bold typeface on a backdrop of blue and white horizontal stripes akin to those of concentration camp prisoner uniforms. A later edition uses a still from the 2008 movie adaptation of the book, and shows two young boys separated by a barbed wire fence, above them a blue sky, while another is monochromatic and depicts the torso of a young boy in striped prisoner uniform, below him the book's title. As shown in Figure 2, the artwork of the tenth anniversary paperback edition of the novel, published in 2016 by Ember, ties in many of the components of the previous editions: the realistic horizontal blue and white stripes of a crumpled prisoner uniform, barbed wire, and bold typeface. These tropes – barbed wire, striped uniforms – are now widely-recognised and well-worn; they are commonly used in media and fiction as symbols of the Holocaust.

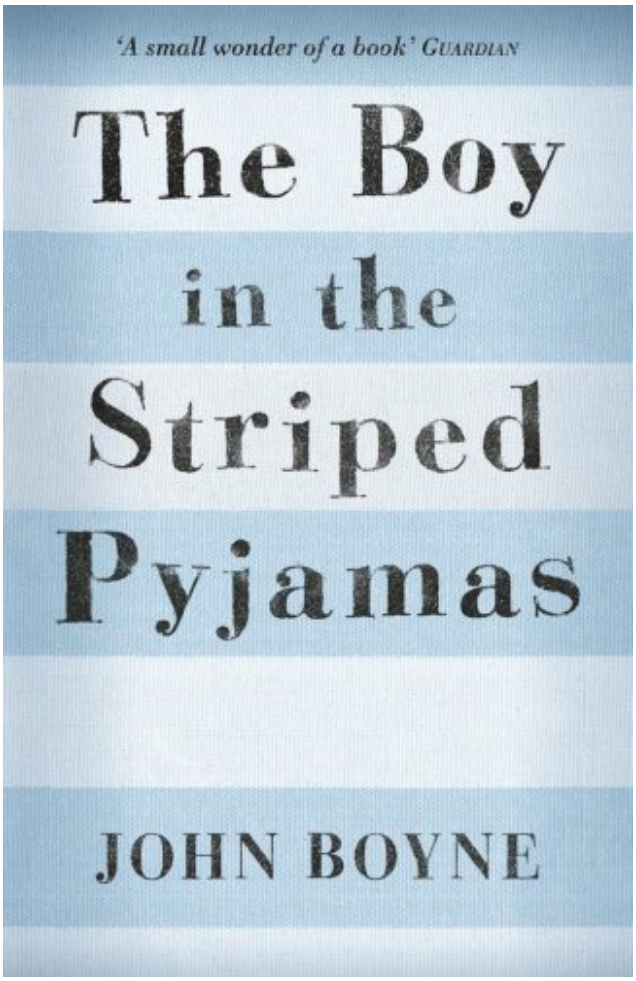

Figure 1. The jacket for the 2006 edition of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Anon, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) <https://www.amazon.com/Striped-Pajamas-David-Fickling-Books/dp/0385751079> [downloaded 09/09/20].

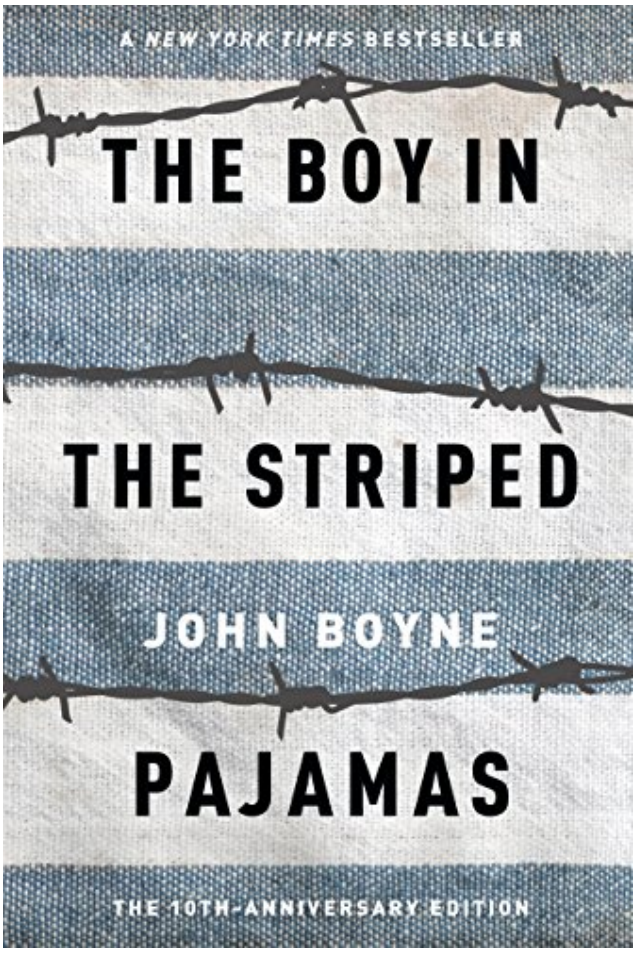

Figure 2. The jacket for the 10th anniversary edition of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. <https://www.target.com/p/the-boy-in-the-striped-pajamas-reprint-paperback-by-john-boyne/-/A-11325338> [downloaded 09/09/20].

This evidently trend-setting design, the success of which, along with that of the story itself, is reflected in the fact that, as of 2010 over 200 million copies of the book had been sold globally, was imitated en masse by other works of Holocaust fiction to emerge in the following years.[120] In 2018 fictionalised Holocaust book *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* – as can be seen in Figure 3 – was published, complete with a dust jacket emblazoned with intertwined hands, blue and white horizontal stripes, and a photograph of the Auschwitz-Birkenau gate house, while the artwork of its sequel, as shown in Figure

[120] "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas' author to publish second children's book', *The Independent* (March, 2010) <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/the-boy-in-the-striped-pyjamas-author-to-publish-second-childrens-book-5530553.html> [accessed 18/11/19]

4, is bolder still, made up of horizontal stripes of red and white. Likewise, as shown in Figure 5, the cover of 2020's *The Sisters of Auschwitz*, a fictionalised Holocaust biography which claims to be based on the true experiences of two sisters, features horizontal stripes of blue and white and a strip of grey barbed wire above a woodland house. The jacket of 2019's *The Librarian of Auschwitz* (Figure 6), is indisputably similar to that of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. Only some minor details, such as the direction of the stripes and the intertwined hands, distinguish the two.

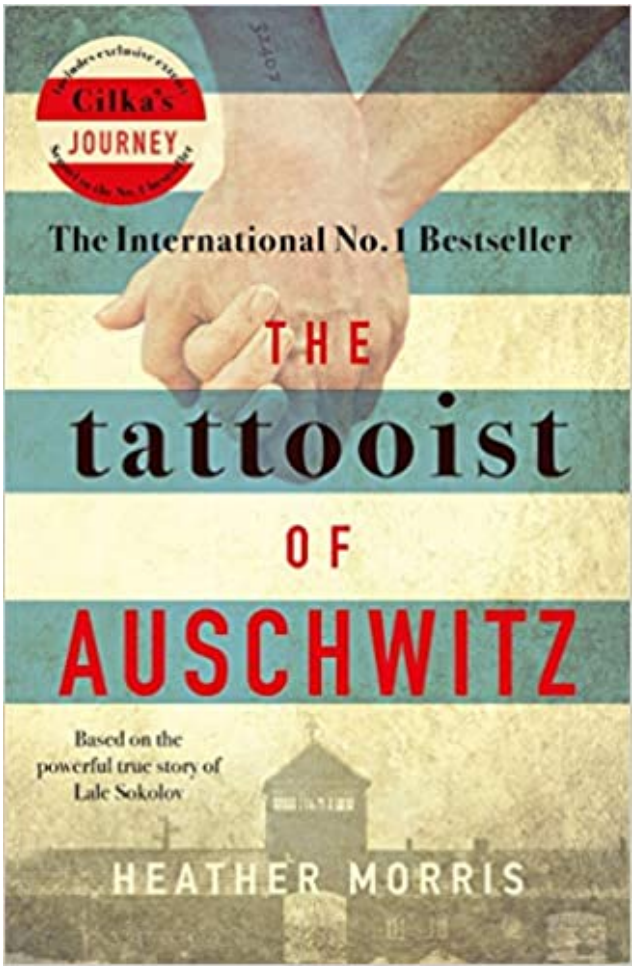

Figure 3. The 2018 UK paperback edition of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. Nick Stearn, *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (2018) <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Tattooist-Auschwitz-heart-breaking-unforgettable-international-ebook/dp/B074CG2SGV> [downloaded 09/09/20].

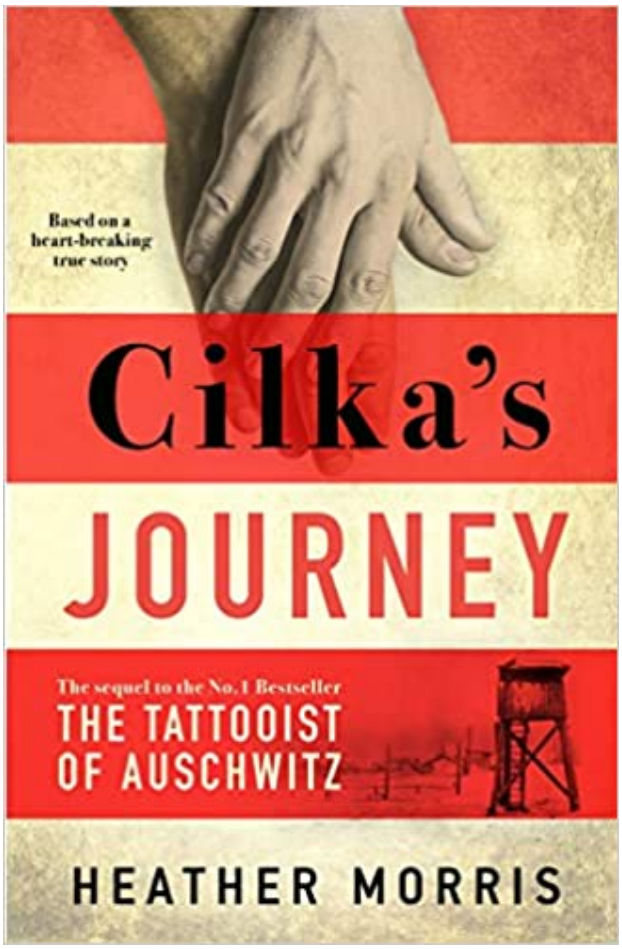

Figure 4. The jacket for the 2019 hardback edition of *Cilka's Journey.* Nick Stearn, *Cilka's Journey* (2019) <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Cilkas-Journey-sequel-Tattooist-Auschwitz/dp/1785769049> [downloaded 09/09/20].

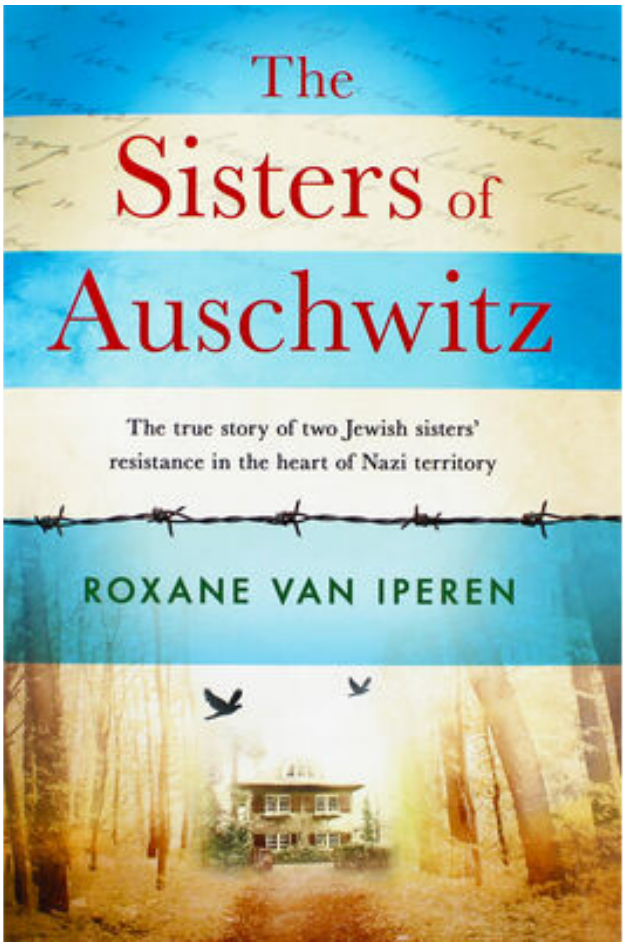

Figure 5. The 2019 paperback edition of, *The Sisters of Auschwitz: The True Story of Two Jewish Sisters' Resistance in the Heart of Nazi Territory.* <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Sisters-Auschwitz-sisters-resistance-territory/dp/1841883735> [downloaded 09/09/20].

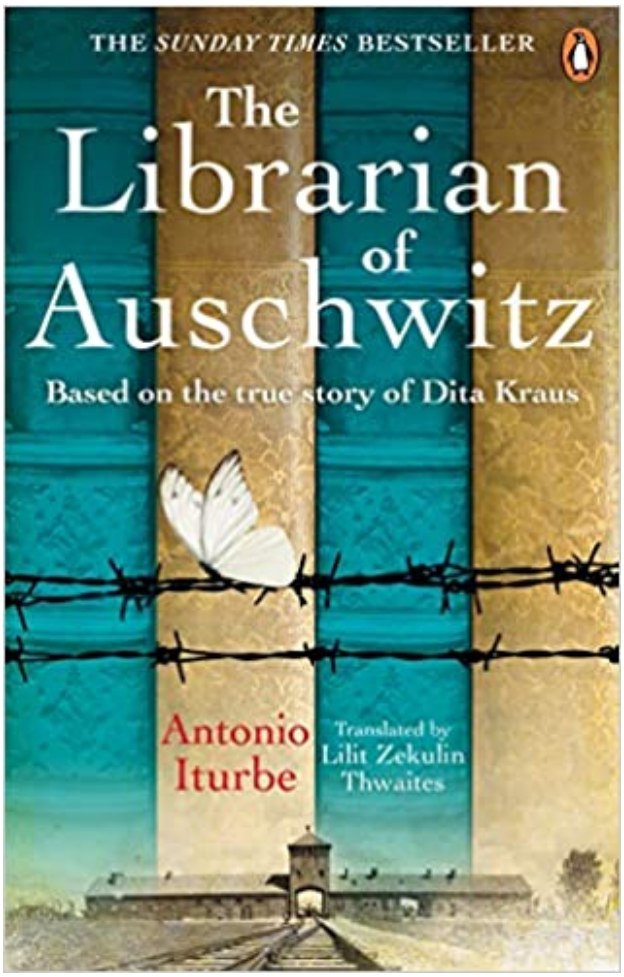

Figure 6. The 2019 paperback edition of *The Librarian of Auschwitz*. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Librarian-Auschwitz-heart-breaking-international-bestseller/dp/1529104777> [downloaded 09/09/2020].

The use – and exploitation – of identifiable Holocaust tropes as a means of marketing literature, and particularly literature which claims to be based on the true stories of individual survivors, was once largely confined to the realms of historical fiction. Yet it has now begun to inspire and be imitated by works of Holocaust testimony. As shown in Figure 7, when Edith Eger's memoir *The Choice* was first published by Rider in 2017, its dust jacket was a simple off-white, a flower atop a string of barbed wire running vertically along its left edge. The flower, one might assume, positioned as if an outgrowth of the barbed wire, is representative of the book's premise that hope can be maintained even in the direst circumstances. As can be seen in Figure 8, the artwork of

the 2018 paperback edition, however, is markedly different. In this version, the blue of the sky at the top of the page gradually fades into the white of snow on its lower half (a colour scheme that mimics that of prisoner uniforms), and is topped with the train tracks and gate house of Auschwitz-Birkenau and four horizontal rows of barbed wire. The upper half of the book's cover features the title in bold and, separated by barbed wire, the phrase 'even in hell hope *can* flower' comes below it. Above the author's name at the bottom of the page, in between parallel train tracks, there are five yellow flowers growing above the snow; a marker of the redemptive message upon which the account is premised.

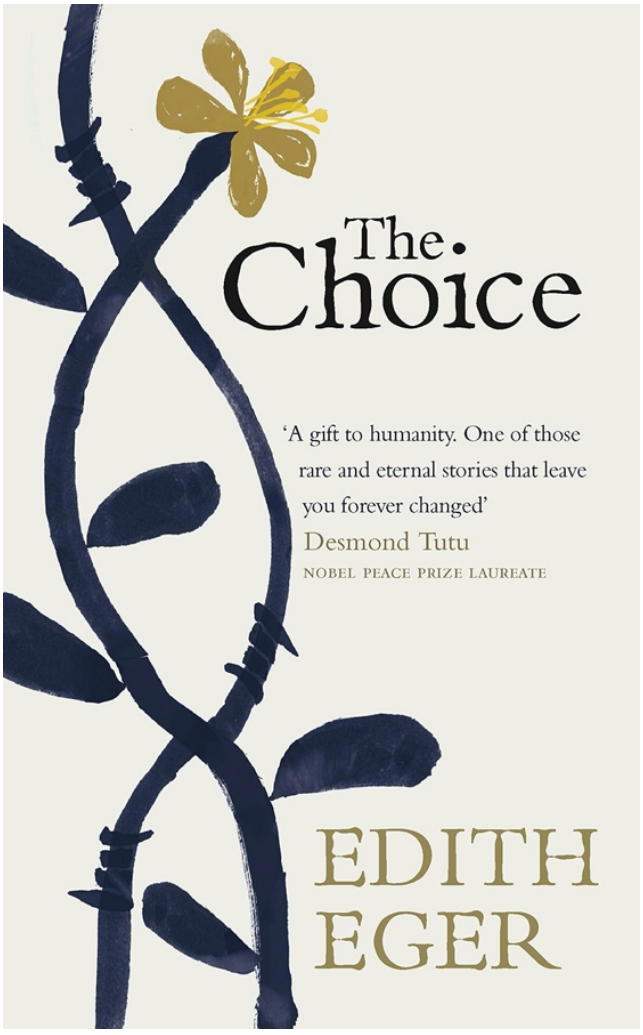

Figure 7. The 2017 hardback edition of *The Choice*. Two Associates, *The Choice* (2017) <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Choice-Edith-Eger/dp/1846045118> [downloaded 09/09/20].

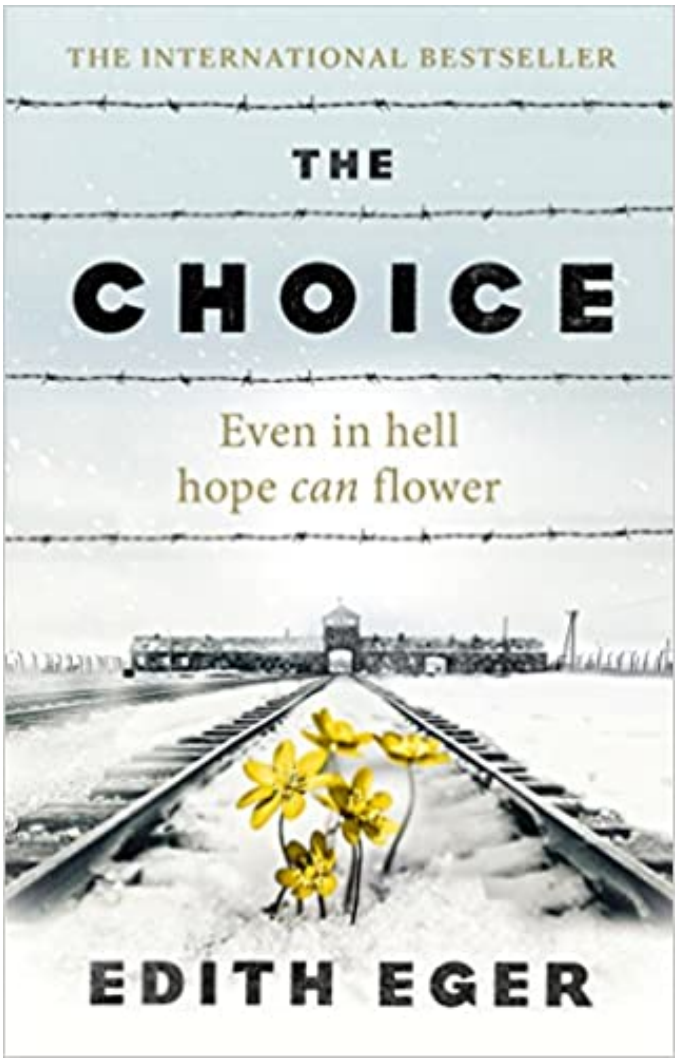

Figure 8. The 2018 paperback edition of *The Choice*. Two Associates, *The Choice* (2019) <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Choice-true-story-hope/dp/1846045126> [downloaded 09/09/20].

Not dissimilarly, and as shown in Figure 9, the jacket of Max Eisen's 2016 memoir, *By Chance Alone*, features a photograph of the survivor as a young boy at its centre atop a grainy backdrop of vertical blue and white stripes. It is described as a 'remarkable true story of courage and survival.' The jackets of Eva Mozes Kor and Franci Epstein's 2020 memoirs (Figures 10 and 11) and Marilyn Shimon's 2020 account of her uncle's Holocaust experiences (Figure 12) are also comparable, featuring barbed wire and a blue and white colour scheme. A quick survey of supermarket book shelves – and it is noteworthy that these books are stocked by supermarkets, which suggests that they are

produced for a mass market readership that may not visit regular bookshops – in the UK, illustrates the glaring similarities in the appearance and tone of Holocaust fiction and Holocaust memoirs, which are, incidentally, often displayed on the same shelf. This evolution of testimony cover artwork, and even publishers' insistence on the sanguinity of the stories behind the dustjackets, suggests that memoirists – or their publishers – are alert to the current demand for bold and hopeful representations of the Holocaust, and are ultimately writing and commissioning accounts for a different readership than that of their predecessors.

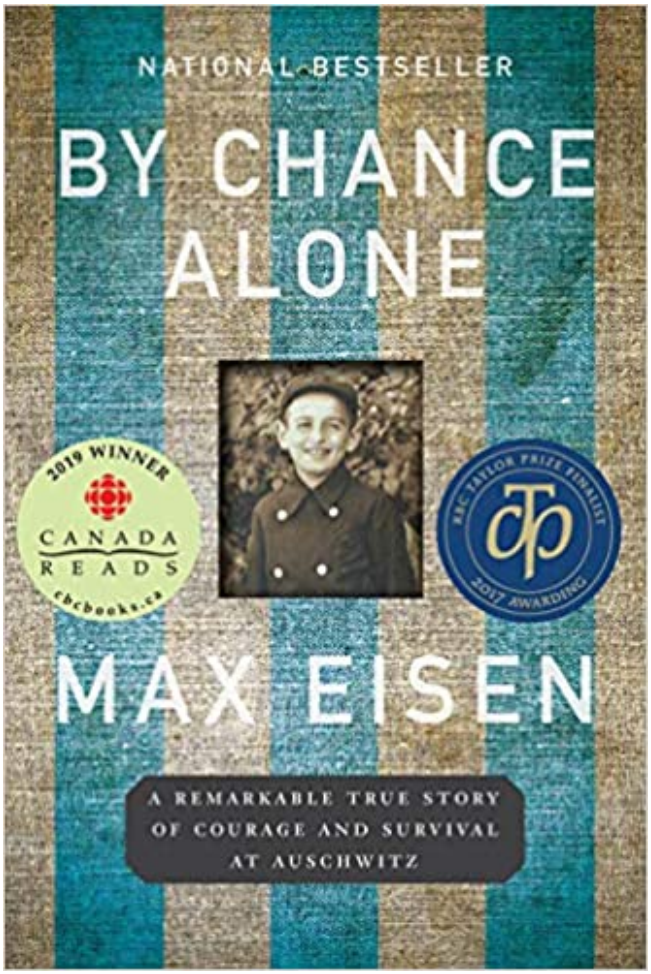

Figure 9. The jacket for the 2017 paperback edition of *By Chance Alone*. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Chance-Alone-Remarkable-Survival-Auschwitz/dp/1443448540> [downloaded 09/09/20].

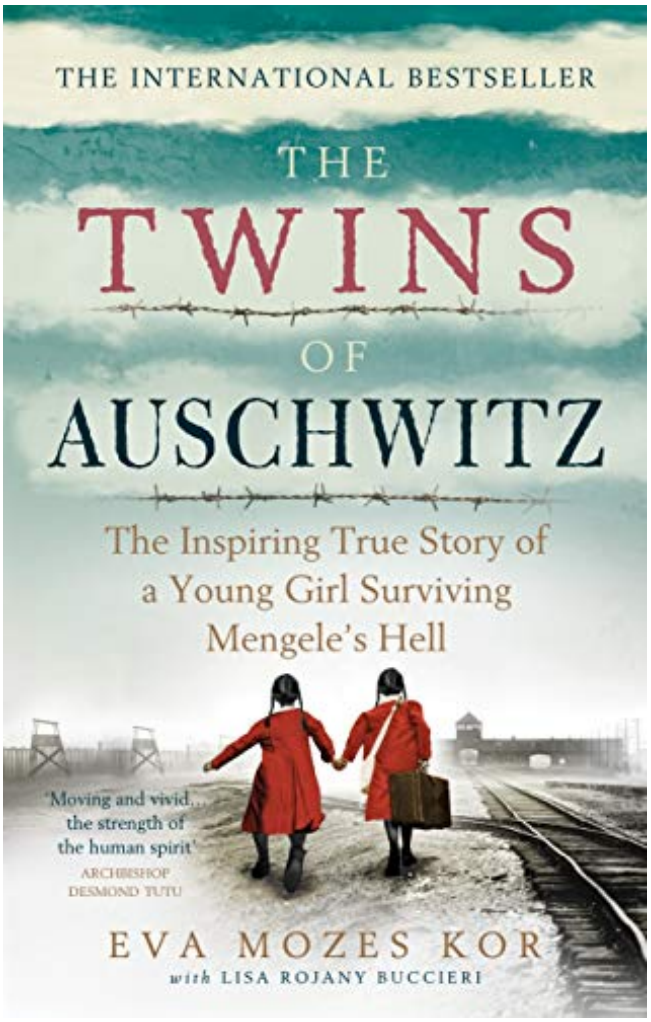

Figure 10. *The jacket for the 2020 paperback edition of The Twins of Auschwitz: The Inspiring True Story of a Young Girl Surviving Mengele's Hell.* <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Twins-Auschwitz-inspiring-surviving-Mengeles/dp/1913183572> [downloaded 09/09/20].

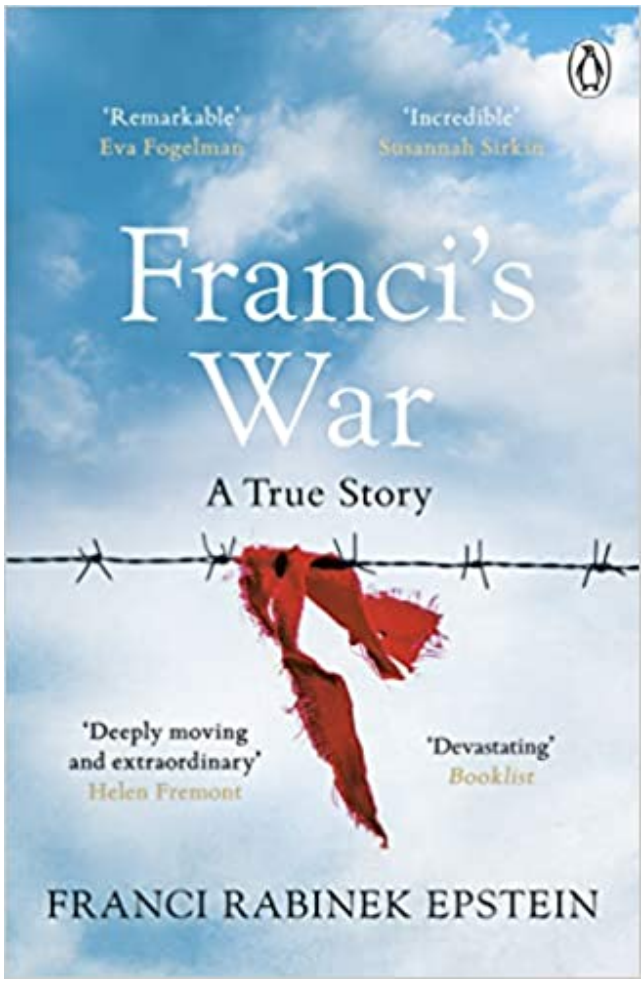

Figure 11. The image shows the jacket for the 2020 paperback edition of *Franci's War: A True Story*. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Francis-War-incredible-survival-Holocaust/dp/0241441048> [downloaded 09/09/20].

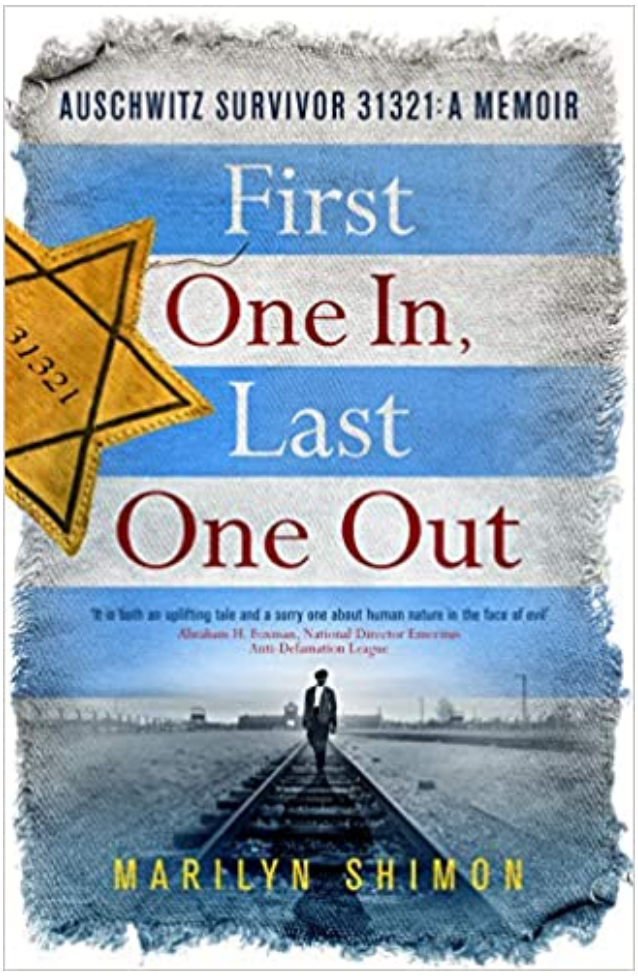

Figure 12. The jacket for the 2020 paperback edition of *First One In, Last One Out: Auschwitz Survivor 31321: A Memoir*. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/First-One-Last-Out-Auschwitz/dp/1913406334> [downloaded 09/09/20].

The meaning of this developing phenomenon for women's memoirs of the present is complex. On one hand, they are coming to the fore and being produced for a mass market readership precisely because they are better placed to exploit heart-warming tropes of solidarity, sisterhood, love and hopefulness. This much can be seen in the memoirs of Edith Eger and Eva Mozes Kor, or Renia Spiegel's diary, described in its blurb as comparable to that of Anne Frank, and as a book that documents 'great beauty' as the author details 'falling in love for the first time.' On the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, women's memoirs are becoming progressively conflated with those of men. As the testimonies of both men and women become increasingly stylised, and model

themselves not only on the tropes of historical fiction, but on the redemptive messages of earlier works by victims and survivors of the Holocaust, it is the similarities rather than the distinctions between men's and women's accounts that are exaggerated and capitalised upon.

We might wonder then, given the changing face of Holocaust testimony, what memoirs of the future will look like, and even, as the last survivors reach the ends of their lives, if they will continue to emerge for much longer. In the first instance, we might conjecture that, besides reissues of testimonies published in earlier decades or the posthumous release of hitherto unpublished accounts and diaries, few retrospective memoirs by survivors will arise in the coming years. We might also speculate about the future of Holocaust remembrance in the Western world. Holocaust testimony and Holocaust fiction currently occupy the same section, the same shelf as one another in bookshops and even supermarkets the country over, and they are, aesthetically speaking, virtually indistinguishable. This signals a convergence of the Holocaust – the material reality of the event as experienced and remembered by its victims – and its fictionalised depiction, at least for the mass market, popular readership for which both forms of literature are contemporarily produced.

In the present, fictionalised and redemptive representations of the Holocaust are not only competing with their testimonial counterparts, but are garnering greater public interest in the Holocaust. To once again echo Tim Cole's observations about the popularity of *Schindler's List* in the 1990s, there remains, contemporarily, a tendency for hopeful, fictionalised Holocaust portrayals 'to provide the discourse by which the Holocaust is viewed.'[121] As a result, authors and publishers of testimonies attempt, aesthetically and thematically speaking, to imitate works of fiction; the result is that the

[121] Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, p. xviii.

two become ever more indistinguishable, alike in design, audience, storyline, and even the very spaces they occupy. In light of this, it is impossible to conjecture as to how the Holocaust will be understood by future generations. It is conceivable that, as fewer survivor testimonies are produced and Holocaust fiction increasingly dominates the mass market, understandings of the Holocaust will exist in a hinterland in which sanitised portrayals and actuality converge. It is also possible that the accounts of Holocaust survivors might come, once again, to out-do and become more popular than Holocaust fiction by virtue of tapping into the same heart-warming tropes. Perhaps Holocaust remembrance will come full circle, and popular demand for the stories of its victims will, once again, dominate Holocaust discourses.

The future of Holocaust remembrance, and more specifically, of published Holocaust testimonies, remains to be seen. It seems unlikely that popular intrigue in the Holocaust will wane in the near future. Scholars and those working in the museum and educational sectors in Europe, Israel and the USA, at least, think that it will not, and have been preparing for the loss of the world's remaining Holocaust survivors by digitising survivor interviews and oral testimonies. This comes in many forms. In 2012, for example, the USC Shoah Foundation completed its 18-year project of digitising – collating video and audio recordings of testimonies and placing them online – 52,000 survivor and witness accounts of the Holocaust. [122] In 2015, to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day, the British Library launched *Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust*, an online platform providing global access to nearly 300 audio recordings of the oral testimonies of Jewish Holocaust survivors in Britain.[123] Launched in 2012, *New Dimensions of*

[122] 'Shoah Foundation Completes Preservation of Holocaust Testimonies', *Los Angeles Times* (June, 2012) < https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/la-xpm-2012-jun-25-la-et-ct-shoah-foundation-completes-digitization-of-holocaust-survivor-testimonies-20120625-story.html> [accessed 04/11/2019]
[123] 'British Library Launches Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust – An Online Collection of Over 280 In-depth Holocaust Survivors' Testimonies' <https://www.bl.uk/press-releases/2015/january/british-library-launches-jewish-survivors-of-the-holocaust> [accessed 04/11/2019]

Testimony, an ongoing collaborative project run by the USC Shoah Foundation and the USC Institute for Creative Technologies, aims to create an interactive learning experience in which visitors are able to pose questions to, and receive responses from, 3-D, hologram-like projections of Holocaust survivors.[124] These will be created from collections of videotaped interviews with survivors. As explained on the project's website:

> The project uses ICT's Light Stage technology and records interviews with seven cameras for high-fidelity playback; as well as natural language technology, which will allow people to engage with the testimonies conversationally by asking questions that will trigger relevant, spoken responses. The goal is to develop interactive 3-D exhibits in which learners can have simulated, educational conversations with survivors through the fourth dimension of time. Years from now, long after the last survivor has passed on, the New Dimensions in Testimony project can provide a path to enable young people to listen to a survivor and ask their own questions directly, encouraging them, each in their own way, to reflect on the deep and meaningful consequences of the Holocaust.[125]

Such projects, designed to increase the longevity of Holocaust memory and education, and, most importantly, to preserve the voices of its survivors for future generations, point to a future of Holocaust remembrance rooted in survivor testimony and identification with victims.

Given their popularity with contemporary audiences, representations of the Holocaust in fiction, film, television and theatre will likely continue to be produced for decades to come. Even after the last remaining Holocaust survivors have sadly passed away – and perhaps even inspired by their passing – representations of the Holocaust grounded in hope and human bravery, in exceptional stories of heroism, will remain in-demand. Even the numerous valuable projects dedicated to honouring the stories of survivors are imbued with a fictional element. *New Dimensions of Testimony*'s 3D

[124] USC Institute for Creative Technologies, 'New Dimensions in Testimony', <http://ict.usc.edu/prototypes/new-dimensions-in-testimony/> [accessed 04/11/2019]
[125] Ibid.

projections of survivors, for instance, are somewhat fictionalised, since although the voices of survivors are used, the conversation between viewer and projection is artificial. However, scholars have worked – and continue to work – to ensure that the lived experiences of the Holocaust's victims and survivors are central to Holocaust remembrance in both the present and the future. Perhaps their efforts, and the work of survivors who have retold their stories, mean that the future of Holocaust remembrance can honour the reality of Holocaust experience, and remain separate from the 'Holocaust' as depicted by Hollywood.[126] While I am unable to prophesy as to how women's experiences of the Holocaust, and indeed their memoirs, will function in or inhabit Holocaust memorialisation of the future, I suspect that they will continue to be marketed and consumed as those with a universal message, as tales of the triumph of courage, hope, sisterhood, and love over evil. These types of memoirs by both men and women, it seems, are the most enduring.

VI. Conclusion

This review of the publishing history of women's English-language Holocaust testimonies illuminates how varying social, political, cultural and personal factors, as well extant testimonial and scholarly discursive frameworks and Holocaust historiography have informed their style, content, materialisation, emanation and reception. The chronological overview of the memoirs themselves and the introduction to many of their authors here provided, serves to familiarise readers not only with the sources examined in this thesis, but to the literary canon of Holocaust testimony as it has developed

[126] For more on the future of Holocaust memory and the digitisation of testimonies see Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivor's Stories and New Media Practices* (California: Stanford University Press, 2017).

chronologically. This foundational knowledge is intended to ground the readers' contextual understanding of the memoirs upon which the analyses of the following chapters is centred. More than that, a gender-based approach to women's Holocaust memoirs, and particularly one, such as this, that aims to offer alternative, oppositional readings of historic texts, must scrutinise the historiographic representation of women in the Holocaust and analyse preceding scholarly views and assumptions about gender variances in narration. It must do so in order to identify the blind spots that not only precipitate those findings, but that remain to be thoroughly examined.[127] In the chapters that follow, I shine a light on – and work to remedy – some of the historiographical blind spots that the repeated assumptions of previous scholars have helped to create, and that, importantly, the examinations of this chapter have helped me to identify. In so doing, and using an 'against the grain' approach to critical reading, I hope to complicate and further our understanding of women's published memoirs.

Chapter 2 begins this process of oppositional rereading through a re-examination of women's testimonial depictions of hostility, egocentrism and difficult relationships among women prisoners in Nazi internment centres. Shifting analytic focus from representations of caring and nurturance, to which historiography has hitherto devoted so much space, and instead concentrating upon these understudied elements of women's accounts, this chapter aims to provide a more representative approach to, and understanding of, their published testimonies. It scrutinises how gender norms and expectations impact the specific and diverse ways that women retell their Holocaust stories, and pays particular attention to the manner in which retrospective narrativization is interrelated with the narrative construction of post-Holocaust identity. It also questions

[127] Björn Krondorfer insists that this must also be done if a critical men's studies approach to the Holocaust is to be carried out. See Krondorfer, 'Hiding in Plain View', in *The Holocaust and Masculinities*, p. 26.

why, if both canonical and lesser-known women's memoirs have a tendency to portray hostilities among women during the Holocaust, the notion of them as caregivers has dominated historiography for so long. For as long as scholarship gives preferential representation to women who conformed, or claim to have conformed, to normative standards of femininity during the Holocaust, while overlooking alternative portrayals and leaving unexamined the role played by gender in retelling, the true complexities of women's accounts will struggle to puncture this established and outdated view. The following chapter aims, ultimately, to emphasise the true diversity of women's accounts of their Holocaust experiences, and particularly their renderings of women's relationships.

2

Writing Reread: Re-examining Depictions of Camp Life

> It was she who now declared that the group could no longer afford to help me along by linking arms with me, that at this hour each was on her own. In a sense she was right, not only was I of no use to the others, I was a burden to them, and as civilisation had abandoned us, we now abandoned civilisation and followed the law of the jungle, which says that the weak must perish. I can still hear her words, that night, on the final stretch of the icy road: 'She has had it, she is finished, if we allow her to hold on to us, she will drag us all along with her, to her and our end.'
>
> Helen Lewis, *A Time to Speak* [1]

For many survivors – both Jewish and non-Jewish, male and female – writing their memoirs of the Holocaust retrospectively, internment during the Holocaust is characterised not only by community and friendship, but by hostility, isolation and egocentrism among prisoners. Yet Holocaust historiography has often been reluctant to emphasise themes of hostility and rivalry in women's retellings of experience. In *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing*, a 1994 edited collection by Judith Baskin, Sara Horowitz observes that:

> The few studies on women and the Holocaust […] take one of two approaches. One approach asserts the equality of men and women, as victims, as resistance fighters, as sufferers and as survivors of Nazi atrocity. […] The second approach seeks to distinguish women's lives and deaths from those of men, and to bring into view uniquely female experiences. […] Both of these approaches yield valuable insights […] But when posed antithetically, each approach skews the discussion. […] The first produces a unified (unisex) version of the Holocaust that unintentionally ends up occluding experiences particular to women. […] The second inadvertently reproduces the marginalization of women, by presenting their experiences almost exclusively in terms of sexuality. In this

[1] Helen Lewis, *A Time to Speak*, foreword by Jennifer Johnston (New York: Carroll & Graph Publishers, 1992), p. 103.

> version, women are seen as particularly vulnerable – biologically vulnerable – to Nazi brutality, and at the same time as predominantly "bonding" and "nurturing" even in the face of extreme atrocity. All women become "mothers" regardless of actual circumstance. Treating women as a more or less unified group […] ignores […] differences that […] contributed to the way victims responded to their circumstances.[2]

This discernment motivated Horowitz in her chapter, 'Memory and Testimony of Women Survivors of Nazi Genocide,' to employ a fresh methodological approach to her study of women during the Holocaust, one guided by the very words of survivors themselves and informed by the premise that 'survivors' reflections are inevitably gendered.'[3] Contemporarily, Horowitz's stance and approach are paradigmatic of those taken in much scholarship on women's experiences and memoirs of Nazi atrocity. In an extensive 2017 study of women's roles in European Holocaust films, for instance, Ingrid Lewis acknowledges that scholarship on women and the Holocaust is 'organised upon preconceived conceptions of gender roles and rigid canons of "rightful behaviour,"' and that such research is often inadvertently guilty of focusing almost entirely upon 'women who conformed to gender roles and identities.'[4] Accordingly, in her monograph she works to move beyond 'the regulatory practices traditionally embedded within gender,' choosing not to focus exclusively on women who conformed to gender norms.[5] Working before and alongside Lewis, and as shown in my introduction, Zoë Waxman has both diagnosed and begun to offer a similar corrective to the fact that 'studies of women and the Holocaust favour stories that are seen as suitable or palatable for their readers, often avoiding those that do not accord with expected women's behaviour or pre-existing narratives of survival.'[6]

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[2] Horowitz, 'Memory and Testimony' in *Women of the Word*, pp. 264 – 265.
[3] Ibid., p. 266.
[4] Lewis, *Women in European Holocaust Films*, p. 10.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, p. 124.

Likewise, in her 2000 discussion of 1970s Holocaust research that pursues gender as a line of enquiry, Anna Hardman calls for the application of critical methodologies to prevent the proliferation of reductive assumptions about women's experiences during the Holocaust. She criticises scholars for tending to 'read women's testimony selectively, identifying what they consider to be "female" experience,' thus neglecting – and silencing – alternative representations.[7] In her 2004 monograph, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men and the Holocaust*, Nechama Tec points to historiographical assumptions about gender as the very reason for the ubiquity of nurturing imagery in women's (as opposed to men's) accounts. She quotes Holocaust survivor Felicja Karray, who claims that in Nazi concentration camps:

> Men, I think, were struggling for themselves. If they had a wife or a child or a cousin, they would work for him or her. But in general, they were sort of fighting for themselves. Most of the time they fought alone, as a single unit … Women always cooperated.[8]

'Some historians have assumed,' Tec observes, 'that women were more likely [than men] to form cooperative bonding groups in the Nazi concentration camps.'[9] This assumption has, in turn, Tec suggests, resulted in the greater and more emphatic representation of bonding in women's accounts.

Thus, at least for feminist historians of the present-day, if not for Holocaust studies more widely, Horowitz's observations, her pursuit of a methodological approach that sought to nuance essentialist research on the Holocaust, continues to resonate. Yet as discussed in my introduction, when Horowitz identified this problem in 1994, her

[7] Anna Hardman, *Women and the Holocaust* (London: Holocaust Educational Trust: Research Papers, 2000), p. 6.
[8] Nechama Tec, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 177.
[9] Ibid., p. 176.

perspective, and indeed, her unorthodox methodological practices, were novel ones; her impression that much earlier scholarship, despite the valuable insights it had provided, generally created an image of the Holocaust that either relied upon gender essentialism or from which women were almost entirely excluded, was accurate. Many of the earlier unitary histories of the Holocaust, for example, largely do not deal with gendered experience, nor the gendered narrativization of those experiences at all, instead overlooking gender in favour of a unified approach that deals with the fate of the Holocaust's Jewish victims en masse. Even contemporary scholarship remains reluctant, and at times hostile, to a gendered approach to historical research. Doris Bergen, to cite her once again, contends in her 2009 concise history that distinctions of sex and gender were made obsolete during the Holocaust, for victims were ultimately targeted as Jews.[10] While her assertion that European Jews were, under Nazism, persecuted precisely because of their Jewishness, is not incorrect, her examination neglects to consider the contributing intersectional factors – such as gender – that shaped their experiences and treatment.

Many studies explicitly dedicated to women and the Holocaust, those produced between the late 1970s and the 1990s, galvanised by the early research of Joan Ringelheim and prompted by the development of women's studies and advancements in women's history, were also the basis for Horowitz's critique. Though the intent of this research was to bring women's unique experiences of the Holocaust out of the margins of Holocaust history, to shed light upon them in a manner hitherto unperformed, selective reading and assumptions about women's behaviour resulted largely in creating a glorified and facile portrayal of women during the Holocaust as nurturers and carers, as, to use Horowitz's words, those fundamentally inclined to nurture, bond with and mother one

[10] Bergen, *The Holocaust*, pp. 8 – 9.

another. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, this axiom was reinforced – and validated – by a number of large-scale studies and monographs. While Brana Gurewitsch's 1998 study, *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust*, for instance, praises, and focuses entirely upon, women who claimed – she does not interrogate *why* women may represent themselves in this manner – to have nurtured one another, Lillian Kremer's 1999 monograph, *Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination*, is unwavering in its conclusion that women's memoirs evidence that cooperation and mutual support were survival techniques used by most women during the Holocaust.[11] Earlier studies, such as Sybil Milton's 'Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women,' likewise propagate dualistic discourses, attributing certain inherent characteristics to women that, it is claimed, helped them to survive more successfully than their male counterparts.

Feminist scholars have begun, in the last two decades, to problematise, dismantle and redress these assumptions, paying attention not only to the diverse ways that women both experienced and narrativized the Holocaust, but to how normative conceptions of gender and other contextual factors influence retelling. Yet many of these assumptions about women's behaviours continue to endure, with insights gained in this present century only minimally impacting wider Holocaust studies and representations of the Holocaust in popular culture. This is attributable, I argue, at least in part, to the chronological evolution and thematic circuitousness of the canon of women's survivor literature discussed in Chapter 1. Many earlier Jewish women's accounts, such as Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, continue to be among the most widely read because of the universality of their message and their redemptive potential. They are well-loved and enduring precisely because – and this is particularly the case with Frank's diary, whose

[11] Kremer, *Women's Holocaust Writing*, p. 18.

narrative ends before her family's deportation to Westerbork – of their focus on hope and humanity, as opposed to the horrors of concentration camp life. In the present-day, and as shown in Chapter 1, comparable accounts by women premised on sanguinity and sisterhood continue to be produced and consumed by a mass market readership because they are well-placed to exploit these tropes. Afterall, and particularly for an audience based in the post-war West, such stories make for agreeable, uncomplicated reading. Learning universal lessons from the Holocaust, it seems, is a central concern of twenty-first century readers. What is more, much research by feminist scholars on women and the Holocaust has, heretofore, been produced. Consequently, unitary histories and wider studies that acknowledge and implement the approaches employed by women's history scholars may, at this point, seem superfluous. As such, images of women during the Holocaust as nurturers and carers continue to receive preferential representation in both popular and historiographical discourses.

Yet it is because the insights of over two decades of feminist scholarship have struggled to puncture this established view that I write this chapter (and indeed, this thesis); I seek to contribute to this field in the hopes of challenging dominant, traditional narratives in Holocaust discourses. In line with the methodological approaches of Horowitz, as well as Hardman, Pine, Lewis and Waxman, this chapter focuses on excavating and evaluating representations of women who did not conform to conventional gender expectations in women's memoirs of Nazi incarceration. I pay particular attention, through close critical reading, to how the diverse group of women here studied portray deceit, hostility, isolation, egocentrism, exclusivity, and difficult relationships among women prisoners in their accounts. I consider how societally constructed notions of gender, time and place of publication, Holocaust historiography and testimony, and the personal background of individual authors may have informed

these representations of women's relationships. I do so in order not only to emphasise the heterogeneity of women's narrativizations of their experiences of forced labour, concentration and death camps, but to interrogate what their reflections can reveal about the associations between the construction of post-atrocity identity and self-image, the construction of Holocaust accounts and expectations of gendered conduct. More than that, I work to understand more thoroughly, as abovementioned, why elements of women's memoirs that do not accord with normative standards of femininity have been – and continue largely to be – overlooked in Holocaust scholarship.

This chapter uses the research of Waxman and Marlene Heinemann on women's experiences and representations of incarceration (see my introduction) as points of departure for its analysis, and owes a great intellectual debt to both scholars. Through the examination of different sources, an expanded research corpus and a broad collection of women's memoirs, it hopes to build upon their research. In particular, it aims to further address the problem that Waxman diagnosed as historians' reluctance to treat narratives that 'do not accord with expected women's behaviour.' Ultimately, this chapter aims to offer a more representative alternative to existing selective readings of women's accounts. Rather than reduce them to idealised narratives of caring and nurturing in order to satisfy pre-existing notions of femininity, it hopes to shine a light not only on the diversity and distinctiveness of women's representations of the Holocaust, but to consider *why* these women represent it as they do.

I. Friendlessness and Difficult Family Relationships

Countless Jewish survivors, and particularly women publishing their memoirs in the 1980s and 1990s, dedicate space in their accounts to the portrayal of women's friendships

and the maintenance of supportive family relationships in Nazi internment centres. In particular, women who were deported to forced labour and concentration camps with mothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, or women of their extended families, often write emphatically about their enduring, supportive bonds, grounded in nurturance, sharing and caretaking. Other Jewish and non-Jewish women, those who were deported alone or with no female family members, or who lost members of their family on arrival or early in incarceration, write of life-saving and supportive friendships formed with other women prisoners, often those of the same nationality or with whom they shared a barrack or work assignment during detainment. Yet this is not the full story. Many women in their memoirs, and particularly those that were published in the immediate post-war years, do not discuss personal friendships made during imprisonment at all, and in fact emphasise their own solitude or self-imposed isolation from the wider prisoner population. Others still, focus not only on depicting strong familial bonds, but on complex and often difficult relationships with relatives, as well as quarrels with, separations from and the desire to remain independent of family members. What emerges from these accounts is not a narrative of women's interdependence and mutual nurturance, but a range of distinctive narrativizations of women's relationships that defy simple categorisation.

Czechoslovakian-born Jewish writer, Olga Horak, was deported as a teenager to Auschwitz-Birkenau from Sered (a camp north-east of Bratislava which served as a collection point for Slovakian Jews) with her family in early September 1944. She was evacuated to Kurzbach, a subcamp of Gross Rosen, in October 1944. From there she was deported to Gross Rosen proper and then Bergen-Belsen in January 1945. She was the only member of her immediate family to survive the Holocaust. Upon arrival at Birkenau, Horak, her mother, aunt Franzi and cousin Ruth succeeded in passing the first selection, and were admitted together into the camp. Horak remained close to her mother (and to a

lesser degree her aunt and Ruth, and cousins Lilly and Trude, who were in a different work group in Kurzbach) throughout their internment in all of the camps until her mother's death shortly after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen in April 1945. Though she does not lend undue space to their relationship in her 2000 memoir *Auschwitz to Australia*, she does note that in Kurzbach she selected the top bunk of their barracks for herself and her mother. She did so, she claims, in order to protect her mother from the urine which often 'dripped freely from the upper bunk,' soaking the women sleeping below, 'and so,' she claims, 'my mother was kept dry and relatively protected.'[12] Similarly, she feels it important to explain of the same camp that 'my mother used to pass on part of her bread ration to me […] [m]y mother's sacrifice for me was literally a case of her putting my life before her own.'[13] Her mother in particular, she suggests, was a figure from whom she drew great strength, and with whom she engaged in mutually protective practices. Yet it is noteworthy that Horak's narrativization does not emphasise friendships formed in any camp. In fact, she mentions only two other prisoners of Kurzbach to whom she was not related by name. Only when Horak describes her time spent in a German hospital following Bergen-Belsen's liberation by the British Army does she recall a personal friendship with a Catholic nun named Bozena, who occupied a hospital bed close to her own. Here, she claims, she met her 'first true friend since the horrors began.'[14] Though her account is punctuated with portrayals of mother-daughter caretaking which allow Horak to uphold a nurturing self-image, her friendlessness throughout is significant.

German Catholic Nanda Herbermann was deported to Ravensbrück in 1941 alone, entering the camp with no family members or friends, and was released in March 1943

[12] Horak, *Auschwitz to Australia*, p. 52.
[13] Ibid., p. 59.
[14] Ibid., p. 87.

after intervention from her family. She published her testimony in German in 1946. In her account, Herbermann writes sparingly of friendships with other prisoners, documenting only that in Block I 'I found a few inmates [...] with whom I had a natural affinity.'[15] She also explains that after the first visit she received from her brother – a highly unusual occurrence in Ravensbrück, and one that signals Herbermann's privileged status – she struggled to concentrate at work, and so fellow prisoner 'Halina was an especially loyal helper to me in these days.'[16] She further dedicates minimal space to an inmate of Block I named Wanda, who '[s]ometimes […] spread a piece of bread with organized margarine for me, and then sprinkled organized sugar on it for me as well!'[17] Yet in Herbermann's memoir, these brief depictions of fleeting kinship are certainly the exception as opposed to the rule. More common in her account are chronicles of her individual struggles during incarceration, or with even greater frequency, expressions of her dislike for the prostitutes in Block II, of which she was appointed barracks elder and later block elder. Far from showing a kinship with the women in her charge, the overarching tone of her descriptions is one of hostility, pity and disgust. Of the prostitutes, for instance, Herbermann writes with distaste:

> It is hard to understand what it means to hold in check and take care of these often fully corrupted people. […] And these people, gentle ones and rough ones (a remorseful one could hardly be found among them), defiant and morally depraved, had to live among one another and with one another, eat at one table, often sit in pairs on one stool, sleep next to one another on a cot. Vulgar brawls occurred repeatedly […] [t]hey scratched and bit and lashed out, these poor, loveless, excessive, unruly human beings.[18]

She continues, writing comparatively of herself and some specific inmates in Block II:

[15] Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, p. 199.
[16] Ibid., p. 205.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., p. 128.

> And they knew how to steal! […] I had already suspected one of them on several occasions […] but I knew, Bertha, that you already had six weeks of detention and twenty-five lashings behind you for theft from your comrades. How well-meaning I was with you, giving you a piece of my bread so many times, often secretly smuggling a few of my potatoes to you at noon – and yet, you couldn't do differently! […] And […] Gisela, […] [s]he was a slippery customer, lying and cheating until she made a ruckus. You, too, Gisela, knocked away the hand that reached out to you helpfully. […] No, I couldn't do the same as you do. My heart ached during your explanation [for being a prostitute prior to incarceration], and inexpressible sympathy for you and your comrades filled my soul.[19]

In Herbermann's narrativization of her internment, the prostitutes, categorised as asocial prisoners by the SS, feature not as friends or companions, not as equals, but as prisoners, criminals, and 'others'. They serve in her retelling as a mark of her own morality and purity; while, she implies, the prostitutes' depravity meant that she could never form friendships with them or behave as they did, that she was forced to keep her distance from them, she could concurrently feel compassion for them. In this narrative of patronising superiority, Herbermann frames her solitude and friendlessness as circumstantial, a result of the immorality of the other detainees. What is more, her use of language is striking. After being transferred from Block II to Block I, she claims to have felt saddened to take leave of 'my prostitutes,' and to relinquish her position as 'mother of the prostitutes.'[20] Her use of the possessive personal pronoun 'my' here implies hierarchy and power imbalance which her use of maternal language only reinforces. Herbermann's reflections are not ones of reciprocity or mutual aid, despite her emphasis of her own generosity, but of thinly veiled condescension and prejudice. It is clear, however, that Herbermann's recollections on the women of her block serve not only to underscore the horror of her experiences of Ravensbrück, but as a literary means of post-atrocity identity construction through which her own kindness is accentuated.

[19] Ibid., pp. 128 – 129.
[20] Ibid., p. 193; Ibid., p. 134.

Polish Jewish writer Seweryna Szmaglewska was arrested by the Gestapo in 1942 for distributing Polish literature as a member of the resistance. She was incarcerated in a prison in Radom before being deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in October 1942. During her imprisonment in the camp she spent much time housed in Block 7 of Camp A, a barrack, she claims, in which only Polish women lived. She worked on various outdoor and indoor work assignments, including digging ditches outside the camp's grounds with Kommando 17. Much of her 1947 memoir is dedicated to representing her solitary experiences in the camp, in that 'framework,' as she calls it, 'of an abnormal existence'; focus is not given to personal friendships, nor is her survival credited with reliance upon other women.[21] In summer 1943, Szmaglewska along with many other women prisoners was transferred from Camp A to Camp B, formerly the men's camp. Here living conditions were improved, as the women had access to running water, suffered fewer lice infestations and lived in less overcrowded barracks. It is in describing the women of Camp B, both new Polish arrivals and those longer incarcerated, that Szmaglewska writes briefly of friendship:

> [b]etween these women who were interned in the camp this summer and those longer in confinement in Birkenau, warm bonds have been formed, which in the terror-ridden circumstances develop from casual liking into close friendship and sisterhood. […] the minds of those who have been here a long time and have had to use all their mental resources to keep their bodies alive begin to wake up now not only from the influence of the sudden improvement in living conditions, which permits them to reach beyond the level of animal needs, but from the stimulus of this contact with new personalities. […] After long hours of work, on short summer evenings, meetings are arranged. […] The character of these meetings and the subjects vary.[22]

Yet contrastingly, while writing of Camp B, Szmaglewska philosophises about platonic relationships among prisoners:

[21] Szmaglewska, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, p. 178.
[22] Ibid., p. 212.

> The person who has lived here for a year is like a man endowed with the gift of immortality; he watches the coming of new generations – and bids them farewell when they depart. If his heart is warm, he sometimes becomes attached to one of those passers-by and with him creates in his imagination a world in which it is easier to live. […]
>
> The taste of friendship is sweeter here than elsewhere – and more bitter too. For it is a composite of the realization that you have found here, in this desolate desertland [sic], a brotherly soul, and of the fear, the well-night certainty, that you must lose that brother.[23]

It is striking here that Szmaglewska avoids using the first-person personal pronoun in her observations. Instead she refers to the friendships, both material and hypothetical, of 'those who can,' 'these women who were interned in the camp this summer' and even 'the person.' Szmaglewska positions herself largely as observer, rather than participant in, the 'sisterhood' that she claims developed among some women; nowhere in her testimony does she portray her own meaningful or interdependent relationships with other women. Moreover, the male pronouns and gendered language she deploys when she writes of 'his warm heart' and 'a brotherly soul' are revealing. On the one hand, this allows Szmaglewska in her narrativization to employ a form of double-distancing as a universalising gesture. On the other hand, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, it sees her rendering kinship a predominantly male pursuit of which she, at least in retelling, remains on the periphery.

Further still, Szmaglewska's sense of friendship is double-edged, represented as concurrently able to restore and destroy the hope of other prisoners. Far from a tool for survival, kinship is here rendered a dangerous pursuit. It is also of significance that the author's only real discussion of women's cooperation in the camp comes as she describes conditions in which the quality of living was slightly improved. Only at this point, she claims, could the women think 'beyond the level of animal needs' and foster a sense of

[23] Ibid., p. 200.

community. This implies that for Szmaglewska, friendship or even socialisation with other Polish women was a luxury that, given its lack of representation in her memoir, she could ill afford. Evidently, writing in the immediate post-war years prior to the preferential representation, in both critical literature and the testimonial literary canon, of women's bonding and caretaking, Szmaglewska does not feel it necessary to invoke women's cooperation as instrumental to her own survival. Instead, in this author's narrative an absence of relationships and the presence of solitude, even as the others are shown to experience short-lived filial friendships, concretise her victimisation and bolster her resilient self-image. We might also consider that although Szmaglewska was Jewish, her Jewishness is not made evident in her memoir; she figures in her account as a Pole, belonging with, and living in barracks among, other Polish Nazi-opponents, and she writes of the Jewish women of the camp as separate from herself. This concealment of her Jewishness, at least in the construction of her narrative, too may have impacted the manner that she chose to represent her relationships in Birkenau.

Other Jewish women, those who write – and lived – the Holocaust as openly Jewish individuals, such as Halina Birenbaum, Isabella Leitner and Liana Millu, even dedicate space in their memoirs to difficult familial relationships, and the desire among some women prisoners to sever ties with relatives with whom they were deported. At the age of 13 in July 1943, Warsaw-born Halina Birenbaum was deported with her family to Majdanek concentration camp, from which, after a short time, she was transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Upon arrival at Majdanek, when the men and women were separated, Birenbaum was placed into a group with her sister-in-law Hela, Hela's cousin Eda Wilner (she features little in the account, for she died shortly after incarceration), and her own cousin Halina; Birenbaum's mother was separated from the group, and she never saw her again. In the author's retelling of this time, her evocations of women's

relationships juxtapose self-regard and hostility with nurturance and maternal instinct. Of Hela, for instance, Birenbaum writes that she 'energetically took care of me, seeing I was half-conscious. "From now on I am your mother, do you understand that?" she said firmly.'[24] Shortly afterwards, she provides further detail about the caretaking and mutual support between herself and Hela at Majdanek:

> She shared every bite she acquired with me. […] Only here did I recognize the true nature of my sister-in-law, and only here did I come to love her. Later, I was ready to make any sacrifice for her. Out of regard for her, and thanks to her help, I too finally joined the fight for life in the camp of death.[25]

Later, in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Birenbaum did indeed make sacrifices for Hela, according to her own account. Noticing upon arrival in the camp that Hela had been given only a thin summer dress to wear, Birenbaum gave her her own warmer clothes, she claims, before slipping back into the inspection line naked to receive more garments for herself.[26] This tactic, she explains, could have resulted in a violent and potentially lethal punishment. When Hela grew frail and sick in 1943, Birenbaum claims to have given her her bread ration or hidden her in the corner of the laundry room in which she worked, and later, when Hela was selected for death, Birenbaum refused to be parted from her sister-in-law and chose to accompany her (good fortune meant that their names were eventually struck from the list of those condemned to death).[27] Here then, not only does Birenbaum credit the pair's cooperation with her own survival, framing herself and Hela as those for whom an ethic of partnership and loyalty was fundamental, but she uses Hela's maternalistic qualities to emphasise both the loss of her own mother and the willingness of her sister-in-law to fill that role. What emerges, and runs continuously throughout the

[24] Birenbaum, *Hope is the Last*, p. 78.
[25] Ibid., p. 80.
[26] Ibid., p. 97.
[27] Ibid., p. 103, p. 115.

account, at least with regards to Hela and Birenbaum, is a narrative of experience centred upon reciprocal support.

Birenbaum's sense of self is further reinforced when her self-representation is understood comparatively, in antithesis to the depictions of her cousin in both Majdanek and Birkenau. The author explains, for example, that in Majdanek her cousin Halina:

> learned how to make her own way in the camp from the very start. We stayed together, though Halina did not like this very much; she had to share with me and help me, to bid for a place for me on the floor, or for a blanket […] She tried to make Hela rebel against me, saying I was only pretending to be weak, and that I wanted to make use of them.[28]

Birenbaum claims that later, in the winter of 1943-1944 in Auschwitz-Birkenau, her and Hela's love and support for one another endured, and after Hela's death, she formed nurturing relationships with two other Polish prisoners. These insistences make her cousin Halina's absence in the narrative all the more jarring. The author recalls that, on entering Block 13 to procure some ointment effective against louse bites, from which she suffered greatly due to her work in the underwear workshop, she bumped into a woman who worked in the same labour gang as her cousin. She writes:

> [T]hey had taken [Halina] not long ago to the gas chamber during a "selection." […] I heard the news of Halina's death with horror, indignation and despair. She had left us long since, and stayed away from Hela and me; she believed that being in good health, and stronger than we were, she would do better for herself if she were independent, without having to share her food with us. She went to work in a hard labour gang, where a *Zulage* (extra pay) was distributed twice a week – extra bread and a piece of sausage. […] She visited us only once, after the famous "selection" when I tore Hela from the clutches of Dr. Mengele. […] But from that day on, I never saw her again.[29]

In this rendering, cousin Halina, unlike Birenbaum, chooses to prioritise her own survival and is reluctant to care for members of her own family. More than that, Birenbaum

[28] Ibid., p. 80.
[29] Ibid., p. 122.

implies that, despite her cousin's belief that self-interest would grant her immunity from selection, those who deviated from traditional patterns of gendered conduct were more likely to perish. The author's reflections on her cousin's self-service and individualism, therefore, work comparatively to underscore her own self-image as moral, honourable and gender conforming.

Hungarian-born Isabella Leitner too writes in a complex, multi-dimensional manner of her familial relationships during her incarceration in Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which she was deported in May 1944 with her mother, brother, and four sisters Chicha, Potyo, Rachel, and Cipi, and later in Birnbaumel to which the sisters were evacuated in November 1944. Though her mother and her youngest sister, Potyo, were selected for death upon arrival at the camp, and her brother was separated from them, much of Leitner's 1978 memoir is dedicated to the sustaining yet often troublesome, and even burdensome, relationship between the remaining sisters. Writing of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Leitner returns frequently to the life-giving capabilities of the sisters' support. She claims that they made a sustained effort to keep Rachel, the most vulnerable of the four, alive in an October 1944 selection:

> We must keep her alive. We love her too dearly. […] Suddenly, frantically, we try to make Rachel healthier looking, older looking (she is only fifteen and a half). Mengele must not have his way. We will keep her alive.
>
> One of us has a piece of cloth. We place it on Rachel's head as a kerchief. We make her stand on tiptoes […] We pinch her face to an unnatural redness… Mengele passes her by. […] We will live on for another day.[30]

She later writes: 'Yes, six months in Auschwitz. And the four of us are still alive. And we are together – the single most important thing. We touch each other. Cipi, Chicha, Rachel, Isabella – the four sisters together, and we seem to be alive.'[31] Leitner's repeated

[30] Leitner, *Fragments of Isabella*, pp. 37 - 38.
[31] Ibid., p. 39.

use of the plural personal pronoun 'we' in these passages speaks to a sense of collective identity bound by reciprocity; Leitner suggests that survival was that of the whole group or none at all, and was therefore the responsibility of each member of the sisterhood. In Leitner's retelling, loyalty and maternalistic care are central, for they render both the author and her sisters, whose individual identities are at times conflated, as those who maintained traditionally feminine values. This is unsurprising when we consider the context within which Leitner's memoir was published; accounts such as that of Halina Birenbaum, which emerged only 11 years prior, had increasingly begun to display a thematic focus on women's natural, and to a lesser extent, surrogate families.

Yet, and perhaps owing to its publication prior to the 1980s and 1990s, when women's roles as nurturers began to dominate historiography on women during the Holocaust, Leitner is open in her memoir about the desire she felt to part with her sisters. She admits that in Auschwitz-Birkenau, ties with family members could prove burdensome and undesirable:

> If you are sisterless, you do not have the pressure, the absolute responsibility to end the day alive. How many times did that responsibility keep us alive? I cannot tell. I can only say that many times when I was caught in a selection […] I knew […] that my sisters […] not only wanted me to get back to them – they expected me to get back. The burden to live up to that expectation was mine, and it was awesome.[32]

When describing the evacuation march from Birnbaumel in January 1945, she writes even more emphatically of her urge to break the pact which kept the sisters together, and its eventual unspoken dissolution:

> [H]ow much longer will our pact hold? Must we all die unless we all survive together? We must learn to break the bond. Therein lies life. Our pact must end, else none will be left. […] We must make a new pact – each for herself. We can no longer fight for each other as before. […]. Our pact now is not spoken but fully understood. Any of the four

[32] Ibid., p. 29.

> sisters is now allowed (meant in a deep emotional sense) to vanish, to die, to give up, to live. The faintest possibility of aiding each other morally or physically no longer exists. […] Between the four of us, we are missing a shoe, and whichever one tries to aid Rachel by giving up a shoe will be the one to die.[33]

She goes as far as to admit that '[t]he responsibility of staying alive had its own inherent torture. […] at times I wished I were alone […].'[34] For Leitner in her narrativization, sisterhood functions paradoxically, at once a means of survival and an obstacle to it. Towards the end of the war, she claims, individualism and self-interest were the only ways to stay alive; by the time of the evacuation march, each of the sisters had accepted this fact.

Despite that, and in spite of her feeling that 'each for herself' was the only premise upon which each of the sisters could live in winter 1945, Leitner presents the final act which saved the lives of three of the sisters as an instinctively collective one. On the march from Birnbaumel toward Bergen-Belsen, in the sub-zero temperatures of the particularly harsh 1944-1945 winter, the sisters, Leitner claims, broke from the line and ran to an abandoned house in which they hid. She explains: 'In a flash, Chicha is running toward the house. Then Rachel. Then I. There is no thinking on our parts. Not a word among us. Just one sister following the other.'[35] Yet, writing with clear tones of guilt and perhaps even anger, Leitner questions why Cipi did not follow the others:

> Cipi, Cipi, where are you? You were marching next to me. You saw me run when I saw Rachel run. Rachel ran only because she saw Chicha run. I ran only because I saw Rachel run. […] Cipi, how could you not have followed? How could you not? Were you not the one who said that no matter in what shape – legless, armless – you want to survive, we must all survive? […] You were supposed to follow us blindly […] Was I supposed to pull you? Was I supposed to tug at your ragged sleeve? Was I?[36]

[33] Ibid., pp. 52 – 55.
[34] Ibid., p. 30.
[35] Ibid., p. 56.
[36] Ibid., pp. 61 – 62.

In the end, notwithstanding her honesty about her sense that survival was dependent upon self-reliance, Leitner's retelling associates survival with a fundamental togetherness, an instinctive pact of unity that could not, at least for her, be severed. Cipi's death – after this incident the sisters discovered that she died in Bergen-Belsen shortly after liberation – could have been avoided, Leitner suggests, if Cipi had only maintained the sisterly bond which kept them together during escape from the march, and followed her sisters' lead. Leitner's guilt, however, for not looking out for Cipi more thoroughly, for failing to ensure that she joined in their escape, is made clear when she asks, '[w]as I supposed to pull you?' Ultimately, despite her preoccupation with honestly chronicling her conflicted feelings – attributable, no doubt, to her testimony's publication in 1978 – about her sisterly obligations, Leitner credits the survival of herself, Chicha and Rachel to their unbreakable bond.

Italian Jewish journalist Liana Millu's atypical 1947 memoir, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, is made up of six semi-fictionalised short stories and documents various aspects of Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which she was deported in 1944 after arrest in Venice for her work with the Italian resistance. In January 1945 she was evacuated from the camp and transferred to various concentration and forced labour camps in Germany. More explicitly than Leitner, Millu recalls the split of sisters Lotti and Gustine in her story 'Scheiss Egal.' Writing of her time working in the Kitchen Squad in late 1944, Millu recalls encountering Gustine, an old friend, in the Birkenau infirmary. After being told by Gustine, 'who abruptly took on a strange look of repugnance and pain,' that her sister Lotti had died, Millu reflects that the strangeness of Gustine's expression must have been caused by the fact that '[m]ost of the sisters in the camp loved each other with an almost morbid attachment, and possibly Gustine, sick as she was, felt her sister's death all the more.'[37]

[37] Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, pp. 149 – 151.

Gustine, Millu claims to have presumed, must have felt Lotti's death all the more because of their 'morbid attachment.' Later, Millu recalls her friend Rosette explaining that Lotti was not dead at all but was 'in better shape than we are,' adding that she had 'signed up for the Auschwitz *Puffkommando* [brothel], and from then on her sister said she was dead, she didn't want anything more to do with her. That's why she told you that.'[38] Millu goes on to describe how when, by chance, she had to enter the camp brothel for a short time as part of a work assignment, she met Lotti, who explained that:

> "But we really loved each other! How can two people be so close and live totally for each other, and then suddenly be farther apart than strangers or even enemies? […] But it had reached a point where we could hardly talk to each other anymore. It felt like any words would destroy what was left of the bond between us. It was wearing down anyway, a little each day, like a candle. We still worked side by side, but without speaking, each of us locked in our own thoughts, sealed up in separate cocoons.
>
> People think blood ties mean everything. But what good is being brothers or sister or whatever, when you see things in such opposite ways? The differences create such a barrier that you have no more in common than total strangers passing on the street. Gustine and I are of the same blood, we grew up together, but there's nothing left between us, because I was afraid to die and she believed God would save her.
>
> […] [T]he day before they asked for volunteers for the *Puff*, we had a quarrel and from then on we didn't speak a word. […] She knew what I was feeling too, but she just lay there and didn't make any move to get close again.[39]

Though Millu's portrayal deals not with her own personal story, but that of her Birkenau companions, it is significant that she chooses, perhaps because they were the exception and not the rule, to depict the story of sisters for whom a maintained bond proved impossible. For Millu in this retelling, Lotti's autonomous decision to join the Puffkomando independent of Gustine was that which ultimately aided her survival. For Gustine, on the other hand, who, according to Millu, grew increasingly unwell in the Birkenau infirmary, the severed sisterhood, and even before that, the breakdown of their relationship, acts in Millu's narrativization as a contributing factor to her ill health.

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[38] Ibid., p. 153.
[39] Ibid., pp. 170 – 174.

In his foreword to Millu's testimony, Primo Levi contends that the collection of stories revolves around 'the specifically feminine aspects of the prisoners' wretched and minimal lives,' among them, he notes, 'the agonies of disrupted families.'[40] Yet portrayals of sisterly rejection are a generally uncommon feature of women's accounts of imprisonment, and particularly those written in the 1980s and 1990s. Separations and disputes among brothers in men's memoirs, perhaps surprisingly, are also relatively rare. In his seminal testimony, *Night*, for instance, even Elie Wiesel, a Jewish survivor of both Auschwitz-Birkenau and Buchenwald concentration camps, documents the brotherly attachment to which he was witness in Auschwitz-Monowitz, a subcamp of Auschwitz that provided slave labour to the Buna Works industrial complex. He recalls that '[t]here were two boys attached to our group: Yossi and Tibi, two brothers. They were Czechs whose parents had been exterminated at Birkenau. They lived, body and soul, for each other.'[41] He goes on to claim that he made friends with the pair, and together they decided they would take a boat to Haifa if all three survived the war. Yet historians' assumptions about gendered behaviours have meant that these representations – those of men's mutual support groups (among both friends and family members) and women's individualism – have often been overlooked in critical literature, and ultimately silenced. Discourses on men's accounts favour competition as a dominant motif, while those on women's memoirs emphasise solidarity. A closer rereading of women's earlier testimonies, however, among them Millu's, reveals an openness among these memoirists to write about family separations and the isolation of individual family members, even in the case of sisters. In Millu's unusual portrayal of Gustine and Lotti, though Gustine is shown to suffer and eventually die in part because of her rejection of Lotti and the sisterly aid she

[40] Primo Levi, 'Foreword,' in Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, pp. 7 – 8 (p. 7).
[41] Elie Wiesel, *The Night Trilogy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), p. 58.

offered, Lotti is shown to remain alive and healthy because of her alienation from Gustine and in using her sexuality as a tool for survival.

II. Friendship Groups and Surrogate Families

Depictions of strong friendships and surrogate families – groups of women prisoners who formed small mutual aid groups during incarceration, with individual members sometimes loosely taking on the role of mother, sister, or daughter – have increasingly featured in women's memoirs published since the late 1970s. These relationships, according to the authors themselves, often proved lifesaving, with members of the group supporting and nursing one another and sharing rations. Somewhat paradoxically, however, many writers concurrently – explicitly or more commonly, implicitly – frame these surrogate families and women's collectives as aggressive and hostile toward prisoners on their periphery, and as fiercely exclusionary. Others render women's friendship groups as fragile and fickle, attesting not only to their protective nature, but to their ruthlessness. While some authors write of the breakdown of these relationships, detailing their own rejection from the group when they became cumbersome through illness or starvation, others emphasise the callousness and opportunism of women's collectives, claiming that such groups admitted members for their hardiness or usefulness and dissociated from those with little to offer. Some memoirists even document existence – either their own or that of fellow prisoners – outside of exclusive friendship and family groups, paying particular attention to the mistreatment or disadvantages suffered as a result of exclusion.

Czech Jewish dancer and choreographer, Helen Lewis, for instance, writes of friendships in Auschwitz-Birkenau with complexity, portraying them as at once

supportive and merciless. In 1942 Lewis was deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto with her husband Paul.[42] In 1944 they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and in August 1944 she was transferred to Stutthof concentration camp. In her 1992 memoir, *A Time to Speak*, Lewis writes extensively about the lifesaving friendships she claims to have formed in Birkenau, and particularly that with a girl named Mitzi with whom she had worked in the laundry room at the camp. These friendships, Lewis suggests, were instrumental to her survival:

> [F]riendship in the camps meant sharing in every sense. The little bit of space, the little bit of food, the moments of acute danger and the occasional laughter. We gradually came to understand that this type of friendship was based on necessity first and affection afterwards. To have a friend meant to have an extra pair of eyes to spot danger, a voice to warn, and a pair of hands to support you when in need. When a true friendship developed out of this symbiotic relationship, then it came a precious tool in the fight against out desperate sense of aloneness and anonymity.[43]

Yet she also describes the breakdown of important friendships as prisoners began to prioritise their own survival during the evacuation march from Auschwitz in January 1945. At the beginning of the march, claims Lewis, not only did she and Mitzi remain together, but they were 'joined by two sisters, and by Vera, who had been alienated from her own group and was looking for friends.'[44] This was helpful for Lewis and Mitzi, for 'Vera was relatively strong, and her fierce determination to survive seemed an asset to our little group.'[45] As the days went by, however, and exhaustion, sickness, and exposure began to wear down the prisoners' spirits, Lewis explains that she began to withdraw into herself. She writes of one evening of the march when the group slept in an empty barn, and she, much like Vera had with her former group, began to be alienated:

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[42] Theresienstadt (or Terezin in Czech) was a ghetto and concentration camp in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, established in 1941. Its inhabitants were mainly Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe.
[43] Lewis, *A Time to Speak*, p. 73.
[44] Ibid., p. 97.
[45] Ibid., pp. 97 – 98.

> One morning I took my blanket and without a word went to lie down among the dying. I pulled the blanket over my face and gave up. A few of the girls who saw me lying there tried to talk to me, but when I did not react, they sighed, then shrugged, and finally stopped trying. […] One evening, like a sleepwalker, I got up, took my blanket and climbed painfully back to my former place. I had had no blinding revelation, no inner voice had talked to me, no gentle hand had guided me, and yet I had got up and gone back among the living.
>
> My former friends received me with indignation and scorn. They were afraid, probably rightly, that I would spread even more disease and infection and told me bluntly that I was not wanted among them. Mitzi was visibly uneasy and seemed to keep her distance from me.[46]

As the march continued, and women prisoners began to break ranks and attempt escape, Lewis continues:

> At that moment my isolation from the group became a serious threat to me, because although I could not walk any longer on my own, they refused to support me. The two sisters understandably were mainly concerned with helping each other, and Mitzi was under the spell of Vera, who, as the strongest in every sense, had taken command of the group.
>
> It was she who now declared that the group could no longer afford to help me along by linking arms with me, that at this hour each was on her own. In a sense she was right, not only was I of no use to the others, I was a burden to them, and as civilisation had abandoned us, we now abandoned civilisation and followed the law of the jungle, which says that the weak must perish. I can still hear her words, that night, on the final stretch of icy road: 'She has had it, she is finished, if we allow her to hold on to us, she will drag us along with her, to her and our end.' And I can still remember Mitzi's arm slipping from mine as she let go of me.
>
> And so I found myself on the outer edge of our row […] I took one leap towards the ditch and allowed myself to fall into the soft snow.[47]

For Lewis, writing in the early 1990s, friendship functions on multiple levels in her account. On the one hand, close relationships are invoked to reinforce a sense of self grounded in nurturance; they frame Lewis as a caretaker and a sharer, even when, she claims, energy and resources were limited. On the other hand, their representation works to emphasise the author's individual resilience. After all, it was the decision to jump from the march into the snow independent of her former comrades that ultimately, she claims,

[46] Ibid., p. 101.
[47] Ibid., pp. 103 – 104.

saved her life. More than that, Lewis's portrayals of the cruelty with which Mitzi and the group discarded her when they feared her ill health could hinder their own survival, demonstrate the barbarity of the concentration camp system; brutish behaviour, Lewis implies, was not limited to the SS. This suggestion not only makes Lewis's victimisation all the more apparent, but further enhances her self-image as one of the few, it seems, to have resisted sacrificing her values in unthinkable circumstances.

Similarly, Liana Millu explains that she found herself on the receiving end of abuse when she was forced to join Kommando 101 – a 'foreign Kommando' made up almost exclusively of Hungarian women – in Birkenau.[48] She claims that as part of this work assignment she felt 'definitely unwanted and like a stray dog,' and 'faced the abuse and bullying that newcomers were inevitably subjected to.'[49] Only a chance meeting with an old Hungarian friend, Lili Marlene, she claims, afforded her some protection against complete alienation from the group. Charlotte Delbo too describes exclusive groups formed on the basis of nationality and even camp barracks (which often housed women of the same nationality, or those who shared the status of political or Jewish prisoner, for example). Delbo, a non-Jewish member of the French resistance, was arrested with her husband in 1942 for publishing and distributing an underground journal. They were incarcerated in a Paris prison before her husband was executed in May 1942. In January 1943 Delbo and other women of the French resistance were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and after some time she was transferred to Raisko, a satellite camp of Auschwitz. In 'Useless Knowledge,' the second volume of her testimony published in 1970, Delbo describes how the Polish and French women of her barrack in Auschwitz-Birkenau decided to prepare a traditional Polish Christmas meal in winter 1944.

[48] Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, p. 15.
[49] Ibid, pp. 15 – 16

Companionship, Delbo feels it important to note, existed between the Poles and the French women, who were willing to pool their rations and contribute to the meal in an instance of Christian solidarity. Yet she continues: '[t]he Russians, also numerous, were not invited.'[50] She goes on to explain the difficulties presented by cultural differences at the meal:

> The Frenchwomen didn't have hosts. They graciously accepted the ones proffered, and tried to repeat the magic words: "Do domou, do domou" – at home. The Polish women explained: "We share the host as a symbol. It means that we also share the bread." The Frenchwomen welcome this explanation with forbearance. It was hardly the time to remind one's companions of any resentment one might harbor due to the selfishness of this one or that.[51]

Here then, not only does Delbo imply that self-imposed segregation by nationality was commonplace in the women's camp, but that collective selfishness was the norm. Though in this passage Delbo shines a light upon unity and acceptance, emphasising the women's ability to overcome cultural difference and share resources, she concurrently suggests that prisoners were usually unwilling to share their meagre rations with those outside of their own groups; the cessation of self-interest occurred only, she implies, because it was Christmas. Furthermore, it was not without difficulty, she claims, that the women were able to bridge an otherwise problematic cultural and geographical gulf:

> The women kissed one another. They never stopped kissing and exchanging hosts and good wishes. Each had ninety-four accolades to give and to receive. As to us – the Frenchwomen – we were a bit ill at ease, because Polish women kissed each other on the mouth, as Slavs do.[52]

[50] Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, p. 162.
[51] Ibid., p. 164.
[52] Ibid., p. 165.

Others too cite the exclusivity of friendship and surrogate family groups, implying (or even, more rarely, admitting) that they knew that the hostility of their own collective worked to the detriment of other prisoners. Bielsko-born Kitty Hart-Moxon, for example, writes in her 1981 testimony that in Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which she was deported in 1943, Jewish girls such as a young political prisoner named little Janka, would sometimes take on jobs as messengers for the SS, severing ties with the prisoner population in the hopes of surviving a little longer. It was as a result of this self-interest, she claims, that exclusive surrogate families formed among women prisoners for their own protection. She recalls observing at the end of the quarantine period and before she was transferred to Camp BIIb, for instance, that:

> As a counter to such self-seeking treachery little 'families' formed within a block: three or four friends would stick together and organize things together. One acquired some bread, another found a handkerchief or a pencil and some scraps of paper, another a mug of water. Members of the group helped each other and defied the rest. Outside the family there had to be bribery; within there was love and mutual help.[53]

She further justifies the existence of camp families, including her own, explaining:

> the percentage of women who survived for longer was higher among the women than the men. This seems to be because of the way in which women responded to their predicament. Whereas the men tried to work through their own individual problems, the women formed little 'families' for mutual support. […] I would suggest that there was bonding among the women similar to that found in the animal kingdom. Maybe it was altruism, but I rather think it was a matter of survival. […] To be alone in Auschwitz was to really risk your life.[54]

It is significant that, much like Szmaglewska in her reflections on the nature of friendship within Birkenau, Hart-Moxon avoids using the first-person personal pronoun, instead writing more universally of the roles within and the logistics of a typical chosen family

[53] Hart-Moxon, *Return to Auschwitz*, pp. 79 – 80.
[54] Ibid., p. 70.

in the camp. This allows Hart-Moxon in her retelling to maintain a distance from camp families' mistreatment of prisoners on their periphery, despite her claim to have formed a family of her own when labouring in Canada with other workers, Isa, Jola and Ruda (Ginger). Moreover, Hart-Moxon's deployment of the euphemistic language of organising – acquiring and finding, she claims – useful objects, implies that her own mutual aid activities did not disadvantage detainees outside of her group. She reinforces this when she claims that upon arrival to the camp, herself and her mother, who spent the entirety of her incarceration working in one of the Birkenau hospital compounds of Block BII,

> [a]greed that no matter what happened, we would not play the Nazi game. Life in Auschwitz was a matter of organizing, of grabbing the bare necessities wherever you could find them. But we never let ourselves be demoralized into cheating the living. If we took anything, it must be from the dead. […] To rob the living, or the half-living, was to speed them on their way to death.[55]

Yet it is striking to note the distinction in Hart-Moxon's portrayals of both her own behaviour and that of her surrogate family in her earlier and later published accounts. By contrast, her 1961 memoir, *I Am Alive*, treats camp families and the depiction of Hart-Moxon's own practices in Birkenau markedly differently. In this rendering, she does not write at all of an agreement made between herself and her mother to avoid disadvantaging the living, nor does she distance herself from the self-seeking behaviour of camp families through the use of universalising language. Instead, she describes the clamour for clean garments following an organised delousing that occurred some weeks into her incarceration in Camp BIIb as such:

> It was a question of grab, and whoever was better at it certainly had more clothes. Here as always, it was everyone for herself, or every little 'family' for itself. This time my

[55] Ibid., p. 82.

> 'family' did well. We were on the grab all right and we made the most of it, and had 'organized' a lot of clothing before the commotion was over.[56]

Here, the use of plural first-person pronouns – 'we,' 'our' – signals shared responsibility and complicity, a collective effort, including that of the author, to acquire more clothing and leave others without; Hart-Moxon does not neglect to describe her own involvement. This passage is not included in the author's revised 1981 testimony. Nor are her claims that, by her second year in Birkenau, 'I knew every corner of the camp. I was familiar with 'all the tricks of the trade,' and knew exactly how and where to get food, usually in exchange for clothing that my friend 'organized' in the sauna.'[57]

This evolution of Hart-Moxon's depictions, and indeed, the narrative construction and maintenance of her own post-Holocaust identity, is revealing. When her first account, *I Am Alive*, was published in 1961, less than two decades after liberation, women's mutual aid collectives and supportive relationships had not yet begun to dominate historiography, and were yet to be a distinctive thematic feature of women's testimonies. In fact, many women's accounts produced during and prior to the 1960s dedicate very little space to representing women's interdependence in Nazi internment centres, and focus instead on chronicling the authors' individual experiences. After all, this was an era prior to the birth of women's studies and the development of second wave feminism, and certainly before Holocaust scholars truly began to approach the study of the event from a gendered perspective. Thus, it is unsurprising that in her earlier account Hart-Moxon writes relatively candidly about her involvement with a somewhat self-serving family. Yet in 1981, the intellectual and cultural landscape that women's survivor literature inhabited was much changed. By this time, women memoirists, among them Halina Birenbaum and Fania Fénelon, and feminist historians such as Joan Ringelheim, were increasingly

[56] Kitty Hart, *I Am Alive* (London: Corgi Books, 1961), p. 73.
[57] Ibid., p. 75.

representing – and praising – women during the Holocaust as nurturers and carers. This may explain why, in her later revised retelling, Hart-Moxon feels it important to disassociate from practices that do not accord with traditional gender roles, instead casting herself as a considerate and compassionate survivor.

French Jewish composer and musician Fania Goldstein, who took up the pseudonym Fénelon after the war, writes even more unequivocally of the callousness of exclusionary friendship groups in Auschwitz-Birkenau in her 1977 memoir. Much like for Birenbaum in her account, these descriptions function comparatively to reinforce Fénelon's maintained benevolence. Fénelon was a member of the French resistance, and was arrested in France in 1943. She spent nine months in a prison in Drancy before being deported to Birkenau in January 1944. During incarceration she was a member of the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz, and was housed with Jewish and non-Jewish women in the musicians' barracks for the majority of her imprisonment. She recalls in her testimony washing the clothes of fellow prisoner, Marta, who was sickly following a stay in the camp's hospital. Fénelon claims to have been condemned by other members of the camp orchestra for offering her assistance to Marta. She explains that:

> [t]he girls, curiously angry, seemed critical of my action, which I regarded as a gesture of ordinary solidarity, but which was incomprehensible to them. They confronted me: Clara, Jenny, Florette, Helga, Elsa, Anny, backed up by the vigilant chorus of the Germans and Poles. […] I was judged, condemned […] I defended myself: "She's just come out of the Revier [hospital block], she can hardly keep upright. I don't see why I shouldn't help her." "Because we don't do that here." Jenny's explanation was precise. "Whatever her state of health, she's got to manage on her own."[58]

Here, Fénelon not only demonstrates the concentration camp system's ability to foster – and heighten – prejudices and selfishness among its prisoners, documenting a reluctance

[58] Fania Fénelon, with Marcelle Routier, *Playing for Time*, trans. by Judith Landry (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. 131.

among them to offer aid to weaker detainees, but categorises close knit friendship groups within the camp as cynical. Only those well enough to contribute to the collective survival of the group, she implies, were admitted, while those who may have been burdensome were rejected.

Furthermore, Fénelon also suggests that it was possible in Birkenau to have belonged, like herself in her own retelling, to overlapping and even adversarial groups. While she was a member of the orchestra family, for instance, inclusive only of fit and healthy musicians, she was also an outsider, a caretaker of infirm prisoners and a friend to all. At least for her, if not for the others in the group, she implies, the two were not mutually exclusive. She emphasises this when she describes her response to the group's condemnation:

> They were all too stupid, too selfish.
> "Look, you poor idiots," I burst out, "if you carry on like this, you'll never be able to go back to real life. You're lost! To live with other people you have to have a minimum of solidarity. You may get out of here alive, but inwardly you'll be deader than any of those poor things they burn every day!"[59]

In her narrativization, Fénelon concurrently renders the Birkenau orchestra collective, of which she was a part, as self-serving and exclusive, and dissociates herself from those undesirable characteristics and values.

Reflecting on the behaviour of the other group members after the incident with Marta, Fénelon writes:

> I felt that their sarcasm was teetering dangerously on the verge of hatred; and once again the group of Poles, both Aryan and Jewish, struck me as the most fanatical and odious. Was I going to become a racist, here where that was the most monstrous of sins?[60]

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., p. 132.

Shortly afterwards she documents discussing her feelings with her friend Ewa, who, she claims, was also repulsed by prisoner mistreatment of other detainees. According to Fénelon, the pair philosophised about why certain women were appointed *kapos* over others, and she recalls telling Ewa:

> When a young girl is flung into this atrocious atmosphere, her instinct orders her to react. She learns very quickly that you have to please the Nazis in order to survive, and that to do that you have to act like they do […] They've ended up thinking like Nazis, feeling that they too are a master race. The Nazis obliterate all traces of humanity in the internees, they appeal to the lowest instincts, set prisoners against each other, arouse all possible forms of savagery, crush the weak, protect those who become monstrous like themselves – and that's how they attain one of the aims of National Socialism: the destruction of human dignity.[61]

For Fénelon, and though she briefly expresses concern that she too may have been turned into a 'racist' in Birkenau, reflections on how the camp system had adversely shaped the characters of those within and without her friendship group ultimately shine a favourable light upon her own maintained principles: feminine nurturance, kindliness, virtue, and integrity.

III. Aping the Oppressor

Much like Fénelon in her account, many survivors dedicate space to the manner in which some concentration camp prisoners, and particularly those of Auschwitz-Birkenau, aped or imitated their oppressors. For many authors, both male and female, these portrayals work to emphasise the corruptive concentration camp environment, its ability to turn persecuted victim into persecutor, oppressed into oppressor. For some in their testimonies, the prisoner-oppressor trope emerges in a conscious and concretised form:

[61] Ibid, p. 133.

the depiction of Jewish inmates willingly (as far as was possible in an environment of what Lawrence Langer calls 'choiceless choice'[62]) colluding with the SS, taking on roles as warders, orderlies and functionaries in order to advance their positions in the hierarchical system. These roles, survivors suggest, often required a degree of brutality and violence. For others these representations centre upon personal experiences and observed instances of cruelty, betrayal, deceit and hatred among the prisoner population, as detainees, according to the survivors themselves, behaved individually or collectively to aid their own survival while disadvantaging – or even actively harming – other inmates.

Some male Jewish memoirists who published their accounts in the immediate post-war years write at length of prisoners oppressing their persecuted counterparts. For Viktor Frankl, aggressive inmates of the men's camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau were simply products of their environment. Frankl was incarcerated in Birkenau in 1944 after time spent with his family in the Theresienstadt ghetto. He writes in his 1946 account of the camp, that '[s]ince the prisoner continually witnessed scenes of beatings, the impulse toward violence was increased.'[63] This inevitability, he claims, was particularly common when 'the degraded majority and the promoted minority came into conflict (and there were plenty of opportunities for this, starting with the distribution of food),' and 'the results were explosive.'[64] Though he claims to have witnessed many fights arising from such prisoner power imbalances, Frankl himself, at least according to his own retelling, did not partake. Comparatively, Primo Levi writes emphatically about the hostile

[62] Lawrence Langer argues that victims of the Holocaust incarcerated in death and concentration camps lived under conditions that '*prohibit[ed]* the exercise of uncontaminated moral freedom,' in an imposed 'condition of choiceless choice, where the only alternatives [were] between two indignities,' and survival reigned above morality; thus, 'the suspension of values […] dominated the struggle to survive.' Lawrence Langer, 'The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps', *Centerpoint*, 4 (Fall, 1980), 222 – 231), pp. 226 – 229.
[63] Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: The Classic Tribute to Hope from the Holocaust*, part one trans. by Ilse Lasch, preface by Gordon W. Allport (London: Rider, 2004), p. 73.
[64] Ibid., p. 72.

environment of Auschwitz-Monowitz. In his 1947 testimony, *If This is a Man*, Levi observes retrospectively that upon his arrival in February 1944: 'I had not yet been taught the doctrine I was later to learn so hurriedly […] that man is bound to pursue his own ends by all possible means, while he who errs but once pays dearly.'[65] For Levi in his retelling, survival is shown to have been reliant upon rivalry and animosity, and unavoidably called for prisoners 'to resist enemies and have no pity for rivals' in the 'struggle of one against all.'[66] He even admits, in stark contrast to Hart-Moxon in her later account, that within two weeks of his arrival at the camp he had not only learned to defend himself against other prisoners, but to steal useful items that may have aided survival:

> We have learnt, on the other hand, that everything can be stolen, in fact is automatically stolen as soon as attention is relaxed […] I have already learnt not to let myself be robbed, and in fact if I find a spoon lying around, a piece of string, a button which I can acquire without danger of punishment, I pocket them and consider them mine by full right.[67]

In his 1986 book of essays, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi goes as far as to describe the men's camps of Auschwitz-Monowitz as 'a continuous war of everyone against everyone.'[68]

Other male survivors portray Nazi internment centres, and even their own practices during incarceration, as similarly hostile in their retrospective accounts. Bielsko-born Jew, Roman Frister, was imprisoned with his father in Starachowice, Mauthausen and Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps during the Holocaust. In his 1993 memoir, he largely characterises his time imprisoned in Starachowice working on

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[65] Primo Levi, *If This is a Man* and *The Truce*, trans. by Stuart Woolf, intro. by Paul Bailey (London: Abacus, 1987), p. 19.
[66] Ibid., p. 98.
[67] Ibid., p. 39, p. 43.
[68] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal, intro. by Paul Bailey (London: Abacus, 1989), p. 108.

the steelworks as that of self-interest and individualism. He explains, for instance, that his father managed to convince the Polish maintenance chief in charge of the steelworks to contact a family friend in Lvov, asking him to sell the family's remaining possessions and use the money to send bread and milk into the camp to supplement Frister and his father's diet. His father, Frister claims, would take only a bite of the bread and a sip of the milk before declaring that he was not hungry and insisting that his son finished the remainder. Frister writes:

> I dutifully obeyed. Only a halfwit would have believed he wasn't hungry. The sticky bread tasted like paradise. […] Without that extra food I would probably not have survived the ordeals of the foundry. With it my father might have overcomes his illness. […] These pages are the first time I have ever mentioned the bread and milk to anyone. That includes Fredek. We were partners in a blanket, no more. I never gave a moment's thought to the maintenance chief either, although the Nazis would have shot him and his family on the spot had they discovered what he was up to. My life revolved around my own needs and problems.[69]

In Frister's rendering, though his father is invoked as a figure of nurturance and sacrifice, much like Olga Horak's mother is in her account, it is the author's own reliance upon self-seeking behaviour for survival, rather than the pair's mutually supportive relationship, that is of central importance. Not only, he claims, did he prioritise his own survival over that of his father and the helpful maintenance chief, but he kept the food a secret from his bunkmate Fredek in order to avoid having to share with him.

Tadeusz Borowski, a member of Warsaw's educational underground imprisoned in Polish prison, the Pawiak, and later in Auschwitz-Birkenau, echoes these sentiments in the final pages of his semi-autobiographical 1946 collection of short stories, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. For him, incarceration not only encouraged rampant self-interest, but fostered immorality and exploitation of the highest order. He describes

[69] Roman Frister, *The Cap: The Price of a Life*, trans. by Hillel Halkin (New York: Grove Press, 1999), pp. 32 – 33.

a heated debate that he and three other survivors had with a Polish poet in West Germany during the first autumn after liberation. The survivors of Birkenau, he explains, maintained that:

> in this war morality, national solidarity, patriotism and the ideals of freedom, justice and human dignity had all slid off man like a rotten rag. We said that there is no crime that a man will not commit to save himself. […] We told them with much relish all about our difficult, patient, concentration-camp existence which had taught us that the whole world is really like the concentration camp; the weak work for the strong, and if they have no strength or will to work – then let them steal, or let them die.
>
> 'The world is ruled by neither justice nor morality; crime is not punished nor virtue rewarded, one is forgotten as quickly as the other. […] To work is senseless, because money cannot be obtained through work but through exploitation of others. And if we cannot exploit as much as we wish, at least let us work as little as we can. Moral duty? We believe neither in the morality of man, nor in the morality of systems.[70]

In these invocations of and reflections upon camp life, at least for these male survivors, survival is shown to be dependent upon aping the oppressor, upon the ruthless prioritisation of one's own needs. For them in their narrativizations, cruelty, hostility and egocentrism were the rule, and were – both for them personally and the other men in their accounts – necessary means of survival.

By contrast, portrayals of prisoner hostilities in many women's testimonies function comparatively, to emphasise the moral uprightness, virtuosity and gender conformity of the authors. After her sister-in-law Hela died in 1943, leaving her alone in Birkenau until her union with two young Polish girls, for instance, Halina Birenbaum claims that her indifference toward other prisoners increased. She explains:

> I was left alone, in an enormous crowd of women – suffering, indifferent and hardened to the suffering of others. […] I was of no use to any of them, my fate was of no concern to anyone – on the contrary, we hindered one another in the crowded barracks […] So the stronger separated herself from the weaker, pushed them away, killed them off.
>
> They often threw me out of the lines for food, stole my blanket at night, or pushed me off my straw mattress to the bare boards or on the muddy boots along the wall. I was

[70] Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman*, trans. by Barbara Vedder, intro. by Jan Kott (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 168.

> surrounded by hostility, but this hostility was no one's fault – it just could not be otherwise under such conditions. […]
>
> I fought for myself as best I could. I did not cry or appeal to anyone for help. I grew vigilant and watchful, indifferent, like everyone else, to anything that did not threaten me directly. It was as though I had become a different person after parting from Hela![71]

In this retelling, Birenbaum's brief period of self-interest is circumstantial and short-lived. Indeed, it was only as a result of her mistreatment by the hardened prisoner population of the camp, and her solitude, Birenbaum implies, that she was forced to prioritise and fight for her own survival while disregarding that of others. In a manner akin to Levi, she draws attention to an environment of hostility; yet she does so in order to emphasise her own largely maintained compassion. In the retelling of this period, Birenbaum feels it important to explain, she was forced to 'become a different person' to her usual tender-hearted self. This lasted only, she claims, until she formed a collective with other prisoners.

Krystyna Żywulska writes comparably in her 1946 account, though she is considerably more explicit than Birenbaum – likely owing to the early publication date of her memoir – about her own burgeoning animosity toward other prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Żywulska and her family were resettled in the Warsaw ghetto in 1941. In 1942 she escaped with her mother and began producing false documents for the Polish resistance. She was arrested in 1943, and assumed the pseudonym Krystyna Żywulska under interrogation (her birth name was Sonia Landau). She spent time in the Pawiak prison before deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau as a Polish political prisoner. Like Szmaglewska, Żywulska does not reveal her Jewish identity in her memoir, and writes under her pseudonym. She describes her feelings after labouring on a work assignment digging ditches outside of the camp's grounds:

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[71] Birenbaum, *Hope is the Last to Die*, p. 119.

> It was impossible to be alone even for a second. I felt that with each day I was growing more animal-like, that I hated people, that I couldn't listen to quarrels or laughter. Our eyes became expressionless and we learned to hate in silence.[72]

This sense of corruption and self-interest are further reinforced – though Żywulska dissociates from them, emphasising the comparative morality of her own behaviour – in her description of the theft committed by her friend Zosha roughly two weeks into their incarceration in the camp:

> As we were going out to the roll-call, Zosha bent down and pulled out something from under a bunk.
> 'What have you got?'
> 'Clogs. I won't go barefoot any longer.'
> 'But Zosha, that means that someone else won't have any.'
> Zosha was so decided that it would have been useless to argue.
> 'She can steal them from someone else, mine were stolen!'[73]

In these narrativizations, both Birenbaum and Żywulska openly write of their own – and other women detainees' – corruption by the oppressive system within which they lived. While Żywulska claims that her hatred for her counterparts silently grew during her imprisonment, Birenbaum frames her survival as reliant, at least during the brief interlude following Hela's death and before the formation of her new camp family, upon her own vigilance and self-interest. Yet in their testimonies, and in contrast to those of Levi and Frister, the authors' own egocentrism does not work to the detriment of other prisoners; while Birenbaum ultimately claims to have resisted, in the long-term, adopting the indifference by which many of the prisoners in the women's camp lived, Żywulska maintains and underscores her integrity by claiming to have openly condemned Zosha's theft.

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[72] Żywulska, *I Came Back*, p. 67.
[73] Ibid., p. 36.

Others too recall hostile environments from which their individual resilience or protective groups ultimately shielded them. Seweryna Szmaglewska, for instance, echoes Levi when she claims that the women of different nationalities of Block 7 of Auschwitz-Birkenau 'do not understand each other. They fight for places, blankets, bowls, a cup of water […] In all of them the camp releases the ferocity and murderous instincts of beasts.'[74] Lodz-born Jew Sara Zyskind likewise writes of merciless rivalry and animosity among inmates. She was placed into the Lodz ghetto with her family in 1939. After her mother's death in the ghetto in 1940 and her father's in 1943, Zyskind was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in August 1944 at the age of 16. According to Zyskind in her account, *Stolen Years*, published originally in Hebrew in 1977 and in English translation in 1981, solidarity with other women shaped her experiences, and ultimately determined her survival, from her very first moments in Birkenau. Upon arrival at the camp, she claims, after being shorn and sent to the right with other young girls and teenagers, Zyskind was told that they were going to the 'schoolhouse' to be educated, rather than joining the women who had been sent to the left and condemned to hard labour. She explains, however, that:

> As we moved along the broad road, I was conscious of a keen sense of aloneness, of being surrounded by strangers, each of whom was utterly alone in her own misfortune. […] Suddenly I caught sight of a familiar face in the [other] group. Who was it? Surtcha, of course! Mrs Zelver's daughter, with whom I had spent the last couple of days in the cattle car! Surtcha was walking at the outer edge of a row of five. A thought flashed through my mind. I must join her at all cost! Anything but this unbearable loneliness. […] Within seconds, I had slipped out of my column and joined hers. […] "Surtcha," I said, "let's try and stick together." I squeezed her hand while the tears streamed down my face. […] I moved back with all the others, and no one noticed that I didn't belong. I remained with the group chosen for hard labor but destined to live.[75]

[74] Szmaglewska, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, p. 184.
[75] Zyskind, *Stolen Years*, pp. 153 – 154.

An instinctive connection to Surtcha which resulted in their pact to remain unseparated during their imprisonment, suggests Zyskind, ultimately saved her life. Had she remained in her own column rather than joining Surtcha, she would have been immediately condemned to death.

The pair's support and interdependence went on, Zyskind explains, once the two girls entered the wooden barracks on their first night of incarceration, to protect both from the growing animosity among the women. She writes of being forced to sit on the floor of the barracks that evening:

> We were pressed so hard against one another that our positions soon became unbearably painful. Surtcha and I, sitting together, held each other in a close embrace. […] Night descended, and we began our first night in Auschwitz. […] Half sitting, half reclining, everyone tried to sleep, if only to forget for a while the horrors we had been through. […] At first people quietly asked their neighbours for permission to shift a leg or stretch an arm, but soon the requests turned into abusive squabbling and violent jostling. The hall was filled with sounds of moaning and outcries of pain. […] I was roused […] by the sound of someone behind us crying softly. Surtcha and I turned our heads to the pale, weeping girl.
>
> "What's the matter? Are we pressing too hard against you? Are we hurting you?" we asked.
>
> […] I felt sorry for this pale girl, whose name was Blumka. "Don't worry," I consoled her […] "Surtcha and I will be your sisters. Let's try and keep together."[76]

Like Levi, Zyskind renders the environment of Auschwitz an inhospitable one, portraying its corrupting impact on prisoners as taking effect almost instantly. Before their first night was over, she claims, the polite interactions among the women of her barracks had mutated into aggressive and abusive ones. These depictions, however, are bookended by – and serve to emphasise – invocations of Zyskind as nurturer and caretaker, and of recurring images of sisterhood. This trope works to reinforce, in the retelling of experience, Zyskind's compliance to traditional standards of women's behaviour, and a self-image centred upon nurturance and reciprocity.

[76] Ibid., pp. 155 – 156.

Giuliana Tedeschi, arrested with her husband and mother-in-law in Turin in 1944, was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau after time incarcerated in Turin prison and the Fossoli transit camp. In her 1946 account, she shows prejudices and antisemitic feeling to have flourished in Birkenau among the prisoner community. She recalls that while incarcerated in Block 13, the quarantine block, on her first nights in the camp, her group were taken to the latrines by the *bloccova* (a female inmate in charge of a residential block in Auschwitz). There, she explains, 'women were pushed and shoved by yet other waiting women who were standing.'[77] She goes on:

> On the rough faces of the Russians and the Poles and the coarse features of peasants from the Ukraine and the Polish hills, a tragic absence of humanity showed itself in outbreaks of savagery. You had at last managed to find a place on the platform when a big Polish woman would heave you from your seat with a threatening shout of "*Schweine Jüdin!*" and truculently take your place.
>
> These beings were everywhere in the camp, they had been given certain jobs to do […] It was as if the soul gradually withdrew from these relics, disdained the body, now inert and passive, that nature had assigned it.[78]

Shortly after this passage, Tedeschi provides a substantial description of the diverse group of women in Block 13 – some of their names, she tells us, were Zilly, Olga, Tery, Dina, and Gerty – with whom, she claims, she developed loving and nurturing relationships, despite their differences in background. What emerges from her retelling, much like in that of Hart-Moxon, is a narrative in which hatred and caretaking compete, the latter ultimately protecting Tedeschi from the former. Furthermore, Tedeschi draws attention to a hierarchy in which non-Jewish prisoners of Birkenau wielded power over Jewish ones, and in which they emulated the antisemitism of their captors. While it is significant that Tedeschi refers to the Russian, Polish and Ukrainian women she encountered in the latrines as 'beings' and 'relics,' suggesting that the development of hostilities and

[77] Tedeschi, *There is a Place*, p. 8.
[78] Ibid., pp. 8 – 9.

prejudices was a somewhat mutual process, her insistent return to her bond with the kindly and maternalistic women of Block 13 implies that Tedeschi maintained her human decency and nurturing qualities.

Other Jewish survivors dedicate space in their accounts to condemning Jewish women (Poles, criminals and asocial prisoners acting as functionaries, for example, are often depicted with disgust but notably less animosity) who took on roles of authority in Birkenau in order to survive, despite the fact that these women were in the minority. In his monograph *Judging 'Privileged' Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation, and the 'Grey Zone,'* Adam Brown points out that in concentration camps most '"privileged" positions,' such as that of *kapo* and block or barracks elder, 'were automatically allocated to *non-Jewish* inmates, particularly criminals and political prisoners, although the number of Jewish prisoner-functionaries increased toward the end of the war due to a shortage of labor.'[79] Michael Bazyler explains that if Jews were appointed as orderlies, it was often 'in camps where the prisoner population was predominantly Jewish, and they were only in charge of other Jews.'[80] Reflecting upon these instances, Bazyler observes that 'a common refrain heard from Jewish survivors of the camps is the cruelty of Jewish *kapos*,' while Brown concurs, explaining that 'although not all *kapos* are demonized by survivors, positive portrayals are generally the exception and not the rule.'[81] This is certainly evidenced by women's memoirs, in which portrayals of Jewish *kapos* tend to be those of vilification, those that emphasise their ruthlessness and cruelty.

Zyskind, for example, recalls the savage behaviour of the Jewish *kapos* of her barracks on the first night of her imprisonment in Birkenau:

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[79] Adam Brown, *Judging 'Privileged' Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representations, and the 'Grey Zone'* (New York: Berghahn, 2013), p. 12. Italics Brown's own.
[80] Michael Bazyler, *Holocaust, Genocide, and the Law: A Quest for Justice in a Post-Holocaust World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 133.
[81] Ibid., p. 133; Brown, *Judging 'Privileged' Jews*, p. 12.

> All three *Kapos* ran wildly about, wielding their truncheons and striking blows on the heads of anyone near them. The red-head flailed her victims with almost ecstatic fury. […] During the day, I had heard it whispered that these women were Jews, not unlike the Hebrew overseers of the slaves in Egypt. This made their cruelty all the worse. […] I […] walked across to our *Kapo*. […] Standing with her legs spread and leaning on her truncheon, she looked at me curiously with a malicious glint in her eyes.
>
> […] "[…] You're Jewish, aren't you?"
>
> "So what," she said in a mocking tone.
>
> "If you're Jewish, why do you help the Germans torture us? Why do you beat your own sisters? Haven't you any feeling of pity? Haven't we all gone through enough, torn from our relatives, deprived of everything we possessed?
>
> […] "Turn around," she commanded. I did an immediately found myself in a pitch black world with stars swirling around my head.[82]

Here, Zyskind invokes the violence and aggression of the *kapos*, and particularly of the Jewish *kapo* by whom she claims she was assaulted, not only to demonstrate the mercilessness of the camp environment, but to underscore her own integrity. The fact that she chooses to include in her narrative her own efforts – and ultimate failure – to understand the actions of the *kapo*, underline the moral gulf between them. More than that, Zyskind implies that her own understanding of the world – both within and without Auschwitz – was one formulated through the lens of sisterhood and solidarity. She makes this clear when she claims not only to have attempted to appeal to the sympathies of the *kapo*, but in her implication that, for her at least, the women of the barracks shared a sisterly bond, and were united by their persecution, their Jewishness, and above all, their gender.

Livia Bitton Jackson, born Elli L. Friedman in Czechoslovakia, was a Jewish woman resettled with her family, at the age of 13, in the Nagymagyar ghetto. In 1944 they were deported from there to Auschwitz-Birkenau. After ten days she and her mother were transferred to the Płaszów forced labour camp, and from there, via Auschwitz, to Augsburg-Kriegshaber, a forced labour site that was a subcamp of Dachau. She too writes

[82] Zyskind, *Stolen Years*, pp. 156 – 157.

in her 1980 memoir of her first introduction to her block's *kapo* in Auschwitz-Birkenau, only days after her arrival:

> But soon a brisk girl appears […] she strikes each [woman of the block] on the head with her long narrow stick. She is our *Blockälteste*. As we come to know the word, we come to know arbitrary authority, cruelty, sadism. She is a Jew from Slovakia, in Auschwitz since 1942. […] Survival at incredible cost. […] She is eighteen now […] [u]napproachable. *Blockältestes* are the commanders of the Block, the barrack. They have private rooms in the barracks and supervise their charges at all times.[83]

Bitton Jackson's lack of understanding for and contempt of the *kapo* is clear. For her, the woman's survival in Auschwitz for so many years came at an unimaginable cost: the betrayal and mistreatment of her own community.

Sara Nomberg-Przytyk similarly feels it important to explain in tones of moral condemnation in her 1985 memoir, that she struggled to comprehend how Jewish women took on roles of authority over their persecuted counterparts. She recalls meeting Fela, an eighteen-year-old girl from Kraków, in January 1944 inside Auschwitz-Birkenau shortly after her arrival. She writes:

> Fela did not talk to anyone. She was always alone. […] I tried to get closer to her but she would not even stop for me. It was only after one of the selections, when she saw that I had protectors, that she reconsidered, deciding, apparently, that my acquaintance could be useful. One evening she came to talk to me.
>
> "Taking everything into account," she said, "is it really that bad for everybody in Auschwitz? *Blockowe*, wardens, and many other people who are hangers-on are living very well. They will certainly live through Auschwitz. I am trying to figure out how to get myself into that group. I have to think of something to avoid being a victim who is always hungry and who is always being beaten by everybody. I have to find a way out, and I'm sure I will."
>
> The girl amazed me. She spoke about the weak, persecuted, and hungry women with such contempt. Such a lack of scruples in a girl barely eighteen years old was something unusual. […] That night I pondered our encounter and the moral problems that Fela had set before me. How could I evaluate her behaviour? In Auschwitz she would have earned an A+. But what grade would Fela have earned if her behavior were viewed within a larger perspective?[84]

[83] Bitton Jackson, *Elli: Coming of Age*, pp. 92 – 93.
[84] Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz: True Tales*, p. 73, p. 75.

Nomberg-Przytyk's portrayal of both Fela and her own response to Fela's self-seeking behaviour is a complex one. On the one hand, Nomberg-Przytyk suggests that she understood that Fela's actions could not be divorced from their context; in Auschwitz-Birkenau, values had little meaning, she suggests, for survival had to be striven for by any means necessary. For this reason, Fela's indifference to the suffering of other prisoners, claims Nomberg-Przytyk, provided her with a moral quandary. On the other hand, Nomberg-Przytyk is careful to stipulate that Fela's 'lack of scruples' disturbed her, and certainly, even within Auschwitz-Birkenau, did not align with her own maintained – and comparatively underscored – values.

Fania Fénelon likewise recalls that the Auschwitz-Birkenau orchestra conductor and block *kapo*, Alma Rosé, an Austrian violinist of Jewish descent, had an angry temperament and was quick to use violence with the musicians. Describing an incident that took place in the musicians' quarters, she writes with disgust:

> Once again, with long-armed violence, Alma had slapped Florette, who was standing defiantly before her, white with anger. Seething, our *kapo* declared that Florette's stupidity and ineptitude made her head ache; then she marched rapidly back into her room.
>
> Florette's face was red and swollen, bearing the imprint of Alma's fingers; she was weeping amid the almost general hostility, snivelling like a little girl. […] For some days now Alma had been particularly edgy, oddly distracted. […] [S]he would […] rant and rage, throw her baton at the player's head, slap whoever might be playing worst […].[85]

Yet unlike Bitton Jackson and Zyskind, Fénelon does not show Rosé's aggression and abusiveness as arbitrary or sadistic, but as interconnected with, and excusable because of, her role as the orchestra's conductor. She even renders Rosé relatively approachable, explaining that, disturbed by her assault of Florette, she had approached the *kapo* to discuss her mistreatment of the musicians. She writes:

[85] Fénelon, *Playing for Time*, p. 115.

> "[…] It's incomprehensible to me that that girl can't accept a slap she's deserved."
> "Why should she accept it from you?"
> Alma drew herself up in amazement.
> "What? But it's reasonable, it's my right. I'm here to make music, not to indulge in sentimentality. You French are so irresponsible, you seem to forget that there's a time for everything; you confuse work and play, you mix everything up […] It's not dishonourable to be slapped or hit with a baton by your conductor, indeed you ought to be glad. It's not an insult, it's a lesson. […] In Germany, it is traditional for the conductor to mete out corporal punishment to his musicians.[86]

For Fénelon, prisoner relations were complex and often antithetical, and in this depiction Rosé is the conductor of the orchestra first and the *kapo* of the block second. In her retelling, Fénelon humanises Rosé, attributing her violent temperament to her passion for music, rather than to an egocentric drive for survival. Furthermore, despite her clear respect for Rosé, that the author feels it necessary to emphasise her own courage and empathy in confronting the conductor over her mistreatment of the musicians is telling; it ultimately allows Fénelon to construct her post-Holocaust identity around kindness and virtuosity, and in opposition to the tyranny of Rosé.

IV. Conclusion

Male and female Holocaust survivors of both Jewish and non-Jewish descent often write about similar experiences of Nazi internment in their retrospective accounts. Primo Levi and Halina Birenbaum, for instance, render the environment of Auschwitz one of hostility and ruthless rivalry, while Viktor Frankl and Seweryna Szmaglewska remember the camp as a hub of physical violence and abuse. Likewise, both Olga Horak and Roman Frister feel it important to focus upon the nurturance and protection of parental love during imprisonment, and Elie Wiesel and Helen Lewis recall forming memorable friendships

[86] Ibid., p. 116.

with other prisoners. Yet men's and women's testimonies are read differently. Though both often depict competition *and* community, women's memoirs are presented as tales of friendship, whereas men's are understood as those of the war of all against all, with the role played by friendship almost entirely overlooked in scholarship. More than that, the manner in which men and women depict – or the significance they place upon – their personal relationships during the Holocaust are markedly different. For men such as Levi in his narrativization, hostility among the prisoner community of Auschwitz-Monowitz is of central importance, and serves to demonstrate not only the direness of his experiences, but the corruptive camp system, which rendered all internees self-serving and cruel. Similarly, Roman Frister's portrayal of his father's selflessness ultimately works to underscore his own burgeoning egocentrism over the course of his imprisonment.

Yet for women in their accounts, common depictions of brutality and hostility, egocentrism, and isolation, are often peripheral, and largely function comparatively: to reinforce the authors' self-image. For some, like Charlotte Delbo, the selfishness and intolerance of distinct prisoner groups is invoked simply to demonstrate that in the women's camp of Birkenau, disharmony was the norm. Yet for others, like Helen Lewis and Seweryna Szmaglewska, portraying the breakdown or non-existence of friendships in Auschwitz-Birkenau and during the evacuation march serves to emphasise the authors' sense of self as independently resilient survivors. For Halina Birenbaum and Isabella Leitner, reflections on women who were unwilling to care for family members and admittances about burdensome family ties strengthen their own personal claims to feminine nurturance and kindliness. This too can be seen in the memoir of Sara Zyskind and the later account of Kitty Hart-Moxon. For them in their narrativizations, the self-seeking behaviour of abusive *kapos* or other women's surrogate families is framed in

antithesis to the authors' own practices; what emerges is a pronounced self-image centred upon sisterhood, reciprocity, and an ethic of caretaking, made all the more prominent when understood in comparison to a ruthless wider camp population. For the women memoirists here studied, the construction of Holocaust testimony is fundamentally linked with the construction of post-atrocity identity, by the need to reinforce an acceptable – and often gender conforming – sense of self.

Other factors too govern how a survivor may retell their experiences, among them historiographical discourses, the canon of survivor literature, the time and place of publication, and personal circumstances. Survivors who published their memoirs prior to the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, before women's mutual aid began to dominate feminist Holocaust historiography and women's memoirs, have a greater tendency to depict survival as an individual pursuit. Szmaglewska and Herbermann, for example, portray generally friendless existences in Birkenau, while Millu and Leitner write candidly about the dissolution of sisterly bonds. Yet in the latter half of the 1970s, once Holocaust scholarship began to pursue gender as a line of enquiry, women memoirists increasingly began to give preferential representation to women's interdependence and nurturing capabilities. For those writing decades after liberation, constructing an identity around the feminine ideals of caretaking and interconnectedness became a greater preoccupation. This much can be seen in the earlier and later versions of Hart-Moxon's account; in *I Am Alive* the author is concerned with depicting the rivalrous environment of Birkenau in order to emphasise her own irrepressibility, yet in *Return to Auschwitz*, published twenty years later, the 'self-seeking treachery' of other women serves as a point of contrast, to reinforce the author's maintained compassion and morality.

The testimonies here examined are diverse, and distinct in tone, focus and style. Yet they are united by their evocations of hostility, abuse and animosity among women

in Nazi internment centres during the Holocaust. Despite this, the notion of women as caretakers and nurturers, as reliant upon women's interdependence during the Holocaust, continues to endure in Holocaust scholarship, with insights gained by feminist historians in the last two decades struggling to puncture traditional narratives. This is likely partly attributable to the *way* that women write about their relationships. Unlike those of their male counterparts, women's portrayals of animosity are often bookended by depictions of women's solidarity; a result, no doubt, of their desire to conform to gender norms and traditional narratives propagated by historiography. Thus, their accounts are generally more easily categorised as those focused upon nurturance and co-dependency as the norm rather than the exception. More than that, and particularly in the twenty-first century post-war West, Holocaust stories of sisterhood, sanguinity and redemption, those that promote universal lessons and exploit heart-warming tropes, continue to be among the most avidly consumed. These types of stories, after all, make for pleasant reading. However, only by eschewing assumptions about women's behaviour and approaching their accounts in, as far as is possible, an objective manner, can we truly begin to acknowledge both their heterogeneity and their gendered nature.

Chapter 3 is similarly concerned with dismantling historiographical assumptions in its exploration of sexuality in women's memoirs of incarceration. Using queer theory as a hermeneutic tool of 'against the grain' critical reading, this chapter explores how authors' sexuality and sexual anxiety are acknowledged in women's retrospective accounts through the portrayal of queer sex and intimacy; it pays particular attention to uncovering what heterosexist scholarly assumptions may have left undiscovered in women's retellings of experience. Moreover, taking into account the construction of identity, the maintenance of self-image, and the myriad contextual factors that shape the ways survivors narrativize the Holocaust, and particularly the elements of it pertaining to

sexuality and eroticism, Chapter 3 explores what women's depictions of queerness through the lenses of fear, disgust and prejudice can reveal. It works to show that by applying fresh perspectives and approaches to historical texts we are able to uncover elements of historical significance that have gone previously overlooked.

3

Writing Uncovered: Reading Between the Lines[1]

> "All I think about is her. Knowing that she's asleep not far from me, that tomorrow she'll be there, makes me extraordinarily happy. Do you know what I dream of? Irene puts her hand on mine, and we never leave one another again. Yesterday evening, for a moment, she took my fingers in hers, and it was so tender and violent that I hoped I'd faint. I kept the feeling of the warmth of her skin all day. This evening, I put my cheek on my hand where she'd touched it, and …
>
> Fania Fénelon, *Playing for Time*[2]

Alvin Rosenfeld contends in *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature*, that 'one of the characteristics of Holocaust writings at their most authentic is that they are peculiarly and predominantly sexless' because, due to the level of suffering experienced by those incarcerated in Nazi institutions, sexual 'passions were secondary, and […] for most were held in abeyance.'[3] When Rosenfeld wrote these words in 1980, he reflected a leading academic discourse within Holocaust studies that overlooked many survivors' contrary narrativizations and oral testimonies. Even in more recent years, historians have displayed a reluctance akin to Rosenfeld's to acknowledge and deal with such topics in survivor literature, and have expressed anxieties about how appropriate the exploration of sexuality during the Holocaust is. David Cesarani, for example, voices the worry that

[1] Parts of this chapter have been previously published. Roseanna Ramsden, "Something Was Crawling All Over Me': Queer Fear in Women's Holocaust Testimonies', *Holocaust Studies*, 26:3 (2020), DOI: 10.1080/17504902.2019.1634357.
[2] Fénelon, *Playing for Time*, pp. 144 – 145.
[3] Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 164.

'it may be in the worst possible taste to dwell on sexuality during a genocide.'[4] Rosenfeld's position and the general scholarly discomfort in addressing matters of sexuality and eroticism during the Holocaust and in testimonial works, however, have been challenged in some contemporary scholarship.

The best-known of these studies are Rochelle G. Saidel and Sonja M. Hedgepeth's co-edited volume *Sexual Violence Against Women During the Holocaust* and Rochelle G. Saidel's *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*. Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg's edited collection, *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust*, also treats women's sexuality. It features chapters on rape and sexual barter, and draws attention both to women's vulnerability to sexual violence and the advantageousness of their 'position to barter sex for food rations, an option that could prove life-saving.'[5] These books challenge the narrative of silence by dealing with the difficult topic of sexual violence and its representation. They ultimately aim to broaden our understanding of the Holocaust through the study of rape and sexual abuse, and work to legitimise experiences of sexual violence as belonging to the history of the Holocaust. These readings provide important insights into women's Holocaust experiences that have long remained disregarded, and they grapple with traditional Holocaust narratives that have left women's varied voices unheard.[6] Yet their focus is almost exclusively on women's bodies and the issues that pertain to them. Moreover, these approaches

[4] Cesarani, *Final Solution*, p. xxxviii. Many contemporary Holocaust histories also avoid in-depth discussions of how sexuality functioned for, and is represented by, victims and survivors. See Christian Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Persecution: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933 – 39* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014); Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Human Tragedy* (New York: Rosettabooks, 2014); Laurence Rees, *The Holocaust: A New History* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017); Frank McDonough, *The Holocaust* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Bergen, *The Holocaust: A Concise History*.
[5] Baer and Goldenberg, eds., *Experience and Expression*, p. 33.
[6] Rebecca Scherr also deals thoughtfully with sexuality more generally, as represented in survivor accounts. Rebecca Scherr, 'The Uses of Memory and Abuses of Fiction: Sexuality in Holocaust Film, Fiction, and Memoir', in *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust*, ed. by Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2003), pp. 278 – 297.

invariably condemn sex in concentration camps as acts of violence, exploitation or exchange. This is particularly true of sexual acts between prisoners of the same sex. The issue of women's consensual, same-sex relationships has generally been overlooked in Holocaust history, with many prominent studies, even in feminist historiography on the Holocaust, neglecting to examine them at all. Many of the more recent studies that focus upon sex and sexual violence dismiss sexual relationships between women in camps as situational, or as acts of desperation, while others reduce them to a means of exchange or abuse.

In her 2015 popular history book, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, for instance, devoted to examining women's experiences under Nazism, Beverley Chalmers dedicates a mere three paragraphs to what she terms 'lesbian love' in concentration camps in an extensive section on love and sexuality among Jews during the Holocaust. She feels it crucial to note that in the concentration camp setting, 'the absence of men, led to women seeking comfort from other women,' and, using homophobic language that directly channels Nazi ideology, that the lesbians in Ravensbrück 'were often German criminals or asocials with masculine appearance and mannerisms.'[7] Chalmers' monograph is a popular – and at times, inaccurate and ill-considered – history book that, in the author's own words, is 'not a German history text, nor is it a history of the Holocaust,' nor a 'theoretical speculation on the academic intricacies of interpretation that could be derived from any or all of the information contained in the book.'[8] The book does not, it is important to recognise, have the same claim to scholarly rigour as established academic studies such as those of Saidel and Hedgepeth, and we cannot have the same expectations of Chalmers's work as of Saidel and Hedgepeth's. Yet

[7] Beverley Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule* (Surrey: Grosvenor House Publishing, 2015), p. 187.
[8] Ibid., p. 2.

significantly, both are complicit, to varying degrees, in associating sexual relationships, and particularly women's same-sex partnerships, during the Holocaust with violence. In examining same-sex relationships within the framework of sexual abuse, or from a decidedly heterosexual standpoint, many such studies, in the words of Cathy S. Gelbin, 'pose serious conceptual problems and inadvertently replicate the anti-lesbianism found in many of the [survivors'] memoirs themselves.'[9]

Claudia Schoppmann's ground-breaking study, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians During the Third Reich*, is the only in-depth monograph to thoughtfully explore lesbianism under Nazism, while her article, "'This Kind of Love"': Descriptions of Lesbian Behaviour in Nazi Concentration Camps," is one of few that does justice to the examination of portrayals of sexual relationships among women in Nazi institutions. Schoppmann, and in more recent years, Cathy S. Gelbin and Margaret Anne Hutton, observe that in memoirs, women that the authors characterise as lesbians (those with an innate disposition for same-sex attraction) 'are clearly assigned either to the "Black Triangles" or depicted as "asocial." The equation of lesbian = asocial made by the SS was largely shared by the detainees. The denigration of female homosexuality seemed to assure their moral superiority.'[10] On the other hand, sexual relationships between other prisoners, such as Jewish women, are portrayed as unexpected and circumstantial. In particular, Gelbin's study "Gender and Sexuality in Written Camp Narratives" offers a rare and especially nuanced example of the depiction of women's same-sex relationships being treated with sophistication. Yet while the portrayal of sexualised power relations between women prisoners must not be underemphasised, as Schoppmann runs the risk of

[9] Cathy S. Gelbin, 'Gender and Sexuality in Women Survivors' Personal Narratives', in *Representing Auschwitz: At the Margins of Testimony*, ed. by Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 174 – 193 (p. 177).
[10] Claudia Schoppmann, "'This Kind of Love": Descriptions of Lesbian Behaviour in Nazi Concentration Camps', *Getuigen tussen geschiedenis en herinnering/Testimony between history and memory*, 125 (2017), 82 – 90, (p. 83).

doing, nor must women's representations of same-sex relationships be interpreted only within the framework of normalising the authors' own relationships.

Instead, I propose here that a more complex view of sexuality in women's narrativizations requires a careful analysis of the authors' representations of sex and romantic relationships between women. This chapter argues that sexuality plays a more important role in the testimonies of some women survivors than Holocaust historiography and traditional narratives have hitherto assumed. It examines the manner in which writers use ambiguous and coded language, double meaning and subtextual connotation to allude to and acknowledge their own sexualities, sexual anxieties, and sexual responses to queerness. It aims, ultimately, to model an oppositional critical reading practice that not only listens to the words written by survivors, but that sheds light upon the words that remain unspoken. This chapter interrogates how women's portrayals of queer relationships through the lenses of revulsion, prejudice, and fear are connected to both the retrospective construction of identity, and, in some instances, to personal sexual anxieties.

This chapter uses the terms 'same-sex' and 'queer' in addressing both the authors and the women they describe as engaging in sexual relationships. It does so because, as Annamarie Jagose explains, the term 'queer is unaligned with any specific identity category,' but, definitionally speaking, it resists a 'model of stability […] which claims heterosexuality as its origin.'[11] It avoids using the classification of 'lesbian' or 'homosexual' – apart from, when necessary, in discussion of historic attitudes toward lesbianism and homosexuality and of texts that use these terms – because of the difficulty in defining who, or what, may constitute or identify as them, and because of the

[11] Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Melbourne University Press, 1996), pp. 2 - 3.

heterosexual/homosexual binaries these terms invoke. In using the categories 'queer' and 'same-sex' this chapter refers to those kinds of women's relationships that are rooted in attraction and desire, those for which 'carnality distinguishes [them] from […] affectionate friendships in which women enjoy each other.'[12] The term 'queer' is used, above all, to point to the fluidity of sexuality and to resist placing subjects into potentially problematic identity categories. This does not mean that this chapter seeks to silence or misrepresent lesbian issues or voices, only that it aims not to misidentify its subjects, for it is important to remember that many of the writers here studied and the individuals featured in their accounts may not have identified as lesbian before, during, or after their incarcerations.

Furthermore, and informed by queer theory, this chapter approaches its literary analysis of women's memoirs through a technique that Bonnie Zimmerman describes as 'peering into the shadows, into spaces between words.'[13] Or, in the words of R. Amy Elman, its methodological approach to critical reading is led by '"reading between the lines." This does not mean that one discovers lesbians where none exist. Rather, […] one is especially careful to avoid presumptions of heterosexuality.'[14] This technique, championed by Elman in her reading of Anne Frank's diary, is one that has hitherto scarcely been applied to the examination of women's retrospective Holocaust narratives. It is grounded in a critical awareness – and efforts to avoid the replication – of the heterosexism of much Holocaust literary criticism, as discussed in my introduction, and demands particular attention to reflections on sexuality that are implicit, implied, or unspoken in women's accounts.

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[12] Catherine R. Stimpson, 'Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English', *Critical Enquiry*, 8:2 (Winter 1981), 263 – 279 (p. 364).
[13] Zimmerman, 'What Has Never Been', p. 2339.
[14] R. Amy Elman, 'Lesbians and the Holocaust,' in *Women and the Holocaust: Narrative and Representation*, ed. by Esther Fuchs (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999), pp. 9 – 19 (p. 10).

Finally, this chapter takes into consideration issues of contextuality, and how changing attitudes toward Holocaust remembrance may impact how, and in what ways, women narrate their experiences. Memoirs written in the immediate post-war years are typically the most candid about sexuality and eroticism, and often feature explicit descriptions of both hetero- and homosexual sex, while those published after the 1970s generally feature little, if any, graphic detail about sexual relationships. Margaret Anne Hutton attributes the frequency of descriptions of sexuality, and particularly of sexual relationships between women, in early memoirs to the fact that:

> Same-sex relationships may quite simply have been widespread in the camps (many accounts suggest that this is the case); such relations may, on the other hand, have been sufficiently distanced from the deportees' everyday experience outwith the camps to appear noteworthy.[15]

She goes on to suggest that such observations may have been omitted from testimonies written decades later because:

> Those writing some five decades later (older, of course, and distanced from the extraordinary circumstances of the war) might both experience a reluctance to revisit such events for personal reasons, and, perhaps more pertinently, be aware of the risks of inadvertently titillating their readers.[16]

While Hutton is right to ascribe this pattern, in part, to the fact that women writing years after the event may have had time to carefully consider the details included in their memoirs, I posit that a further explanation is the post-Holocaust development of what Erica Bouris calls 'the ideal victim discourse of the Holocaust.'[17] This discourse, conceived in the 1960s in the wake of the widely-publicised trials of Nazi war criminals,

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[15] Margaret Anne Hutton, *Testimony from the Nazi Camps: French Women's Voices* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 84.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Bouris, *Complex Political Victims*, p. 72.

was further advanced by the establishment of Holocaust theology, which, according to Bouris, triggered a 'chain of equivalence between the victim identity and innocence, purity, moral superiority, and lack of responsibility.'[18] Thus, it is possible that in the immediate post-war years, prior to the establishment of this narrative, survivors may have felt able to write more honestly about their observations of sexuality and sexualised power in concentration camps.

Those writing later, on the other hand, did so once a normative standard of Holocaust testimony – one that dictated which issues, such as sexuality and consensual sex, were generally not appropriate for inclusion – had been established, and therefore discuss queer sex rarely. This may also go some way to explaining the dearth of first-person narratives written by those who claim personal involvement in a same-sex relationship, and why many authors that document such relationships do so in prejudicial tones, even decades after the event and despite growing acceptance in the West of LGBTQ+ issues throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. More than that, women writing and publishing their memoirs in the immediate post-war period were the first survivors to do so. As such, an influential dialogue between women's testimonies by which authors could gauge the acceptability of included content, had not yet been established. This may further explain why women's testimonies of the 1940s and 1950s reflect more frankly upon matters of eroticism and sexuality than those produced much later, once a normative standard of testimony had been developed.

[18] Ibid.

I. Paragraph 175 and Nazi Sexual Policy

Prior to the rise of Nazism in Germany, Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code, established in 1871 based on a Prussian provision from 1794, made homosexual relations between men a crime punishable by law. The statute also made illegal bestiality and certain forms of prostitution.[19] Likewise, Paragraph 129 I of the Austrian Criminal Code, established in 1852, criminalised homosexual acts between both men and women. Johann K. Kirchknopf explains that the statute:

> [D]efined the crime of "unnatural fornication" as follows: "Fornication against nature, that is, a) with animals, b) with persons of the same sex." Paragraph 130 ordered the penalty to be between one and five years in regular cases, which could be extended, for example, to life in prison if the criminal action resulted in the death of a person involved. […] The wording included women […].[20]

Despite these laws, the twentieth century, and particularly the 1920s, in fact, welcomed the first shifts in European attitudes toward homosexuality and sexuality more generally. Anna Hájková notes that in the early twentieth century both Weimar Germany and Czechoslovakia, and many other Western and Central European countries, 'had a vocal movement calling for the decriminalization of homosexuality, there was a gay subculture, with bars, journals, novels, and activists.'[21] Klaus Miller explains that in Germany itself in the 1920s, there were few actual prosecutions under the sodomy law, and there was also a vocal gay and lesbian movement that almost succeeded in abolishing Paragraph

[19] Klaus Miller, 'Introduction' in Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle: The True, Life-and-Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps*, trans. by David Fernbach (London: Gay Man's Press, 1994), pp. i – xiv (p. iii).
[20] Johann K. Kirchknopf, 'The Anschluss – Also a Sexual Annexation? The Situation of Homosexual Men and Lesbian Women in Austria under Nazi Rule,' in *Queer in Europe during the Second World War*, ed. by Régis Schlagdenhauffen (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2018), pp. 39 – 52 (p. 42).
[21] Anna Hájková, 'Opinion // How We've Suppressed the Queer History of the Holocaust', *Haaretz* (2018) <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-why-we-ve-suppressed-the-queer-history-of-the-holocaust-1.5823923> [accessed 27th November 2018]

175 entirely, but that the anti-sodomy law was ultimately dropped because of the growing influence of the Nazi party in German politics.[22] The homophobia that would be so central to Nazi sexual policy, therefore, was not simply 'a natural outgrowth of 1930s society' in Europe, for in fact, 'the opposite was the case.'[23] Nazism's discrimination and targeted persecution of homosexual men was particular to the Nazi party.

In January1933 Nazi sexual policy began to be introduced to Germany. With regards to heterosexuality, it railed against the liberalism of the Weimar era and sought to introduce its own brand of progressivism to Germany. This sexual policy concurrently, and somewhat contradictorily, promoted sexual freedom among "pure-blooded" Aryans, who were encouraged to 'be proud of their bodies and enjoy the natural pleasures of sex without being ashamed'[24] – or as Dagmar Herzog puts it, it endorsed 'joyous heterosexuality among those ideologically and racially "approved" by the regime' – and yet encouraged a 'return to more conservative values and behaviours.'[25] According to Herzog, 'just as sexually conservative mores were expressed through anti-Semitism, so were the Nazis' particular versions of sexually emancipatory ideas.'[26] Nazism's attitude toward homosexuality, however, was less conflicted.

In June 1935 the Party modified Paragraph 175 so that it could be applied to sexual and intimate acts between men other than those classified as sodomy and introduced Paragraph 175a, which addressed the punishment of male homosexual rape, male prostitution, and aggravated cases involving youths or subordinates, and carried longer

[22] Miller, 'Introduction' in *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, p. iv.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Dr Hans Endres quoted in George W. Herald, 'Sex is a Nazi Weapon,' *American Mercury*, 54:222 (1942), p. 661.
[25] Dagmar Herzog, 'Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11:1/2 (Jan. – Apr., 2002), 3 – 21 (p. 9); Ibid., p. 6.
[26] Ibid., p. 11.

prison sentences.[27] The regime also formed The Reich Office for the Combating of Abortion and Homosexuality, which increased the denunciation, registration and surveillance of gay men, in 1936.[28] In 1939 the Party began to intensify its assault on male homosexuality, implementing substantial anti-gay policies and increasing police power. It made legal the deportation of gay men to concentration camps, introduced the death penalty for cases considered particularly serious, and exerted pressure on homosexual men to undergo medical castration.[29] By the late 1930s, as Günter Grau explains, one of the stated aims 'of the Nazi regime was to eradicate homosexuality. To this end homosexuals were watched, arrested, registered, prosecuted and segregated; they were to be reeducated, castrated and – if this was unsuccessful – exterminated.'[30]

Though the accuracy of contemporary figures on the Nazi regime's persecution and murder of homosexual German men remains in dispute, they nonetheless illustrate the extent to which such men were targeted, if not for outright extermination, then for exploitation, re-education and forced labour. Between 1933 and 1945 the Gestapo registered roughly 100,000 gay men in Germany and the occupied territories, sentencing half of them in court for homosexuality, while it is believed that between 10,000 and 15,000 gay men were deported to concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Europe, where two-thirds of them perished.[31] These men were predominantly of German and Austrian nationality, for:

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[27] Clayton J. Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality in West Germany: Between Persecution and Freedom, 1945-69* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)), pp. 20 – 21.
[28] William J. Spurlin, 'Queering Holocaust Studies: New Frameworks for Understanding Nazi Homophobia and the Politics of Sexuality under National Socialism' in *A Companion to the Holocaust*, ed. by Simone Gigliotti and Hilary Earl (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), pp. 75 – 94 (p. 82).
[29] Geoffrey J. Giles, 'The Persecution of Gay Men and Lesbians During the Third Reich' in *The Routledge History of the Holocaust*, ed. by Jonathan C. Friedman (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 385 – 396 (p. 394).
[30] Günter Grau, ed., *Hidden Holocaust? Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany 1933 – 45*, trans. by Patrick Camiller (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1995), p. 4.
[31] Kai Hammermeister, 'Inventing History: Toward a Gay Holocaust Literature', *The German Quarterly*, 70:1 (Winter, 1997), 18 – 26 (p. 19).

> homosexuality outside Germany (and incorporated Austria and other annexed territories) was not a subject generally addressed in Nazi ideology or policy; the concern focused on the impact of homosexuality on the strength and birth-rate of the Aryan population. During the war years […] the Nazis did not generally instigate drives against homosexuality in German-occupied countries.[32]

As Richard Plant explains, 'among the "inferior" peoples of the occupied territories [homosexuality] was to be tolerated as a tactic for weakening their "vigor." […] non-German homosexuals were not to be punished like German homosexuals, but exiled from German territories.'[33]

Nazi sexual policy, however, did not criminally prosecute lesbians. The Nazi regime's revisions of the German Criminal Code dealt exclusively with male homosexuality; Paragraph 175, under Nazism and in the Weimar era, did not persecute female homosexuality, which remained legal in Germany both during and after the Second World War. While there was some dispute among high-ranking Nazi officials and cabinet members as to the expansion of the statute to include the criminalisation of lesbianism, the expansion was ultimately opposed. This was largely because the regime did not perceive lesbianism to be a threat to its population policy, and therefore to the expansion of the Third Reich. In 1935 Franz Gürtner, German Minister of Justice in Hitler's cabinet, summarised this when he contended that, with regards to gay men, 'fertility is wasted; they usually do not procreate at all. This is not true regarding women, or at least not to the same extent.'[34] At an ideological level, Nazism maintained that 'a seduced woman was not permanently withdrawn from normal sexual intercourse, but

[32] 'Homosexuals', *Holocaust Teacher Resource Centre* (2018) < https://www.holocaust-trc.org/homosexuals/> [accessed 27th November 2018]
[33] Richard Plant, ed., *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* (New York: Holt Paperback, 1986), p. 100.
[34] Franz Gürtner, ed., *Das kommende deutsche Strafrecht. Bericht über die Arbeit der amtlichen Strafrechtskommission* (Berlin, 1935), p. 126.

retained her usability in terms of population policy.'[35] As such, women, who, as Schoppmann observes, had a 'generally subordinate status in society and were excluded from positions of power in any case,' were excepted from criminal persecution under Paragraph 175.[36]

Yet though the Nazis 'sharply distinguished in practice between the two sexes,' it is not the case that lesbians 'suffered little feared or actual persecution as lesbians or more broadly as resistant women' under National Socialism.[37] Schoppmann explains that 'only a few cases in which women were persecuted because of their homosexuality have been documented, since other "offenses" were generally listed under the official charge, such as "political unreliability" or "subversion of the national defense."'[38] She further makes clear that:

> the number of women who were subjected to the horrors of the concentration camps because they were lesbians cannot be documented. What is definitive is that there was no systematic persecution of lesbians that was comparable to the persecution of gay men. Most lesbians were spared a fate in the camps if they were not endangered for other reasons and if they were willing to conform. Lesbians were not victims of the Nazi regime per se.[39]

Despite this, the regime did not change the Austrian law that criminalised lesbianism. It also succeeded in creating an environment of fear for lesbians and queer women in Germany.[40] The closure of many well-known lesbian and gay bars and restaurants, and organisations such as the Institute for Sexology and the Human Rights League, coupled

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[35] BAK, R61/127, p. 198, cited in Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, p. 17.
[36] Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, p. 17.
[37] Claudia Schoppmann, 'The Position of Lesbian Women in the Nazi Period', in *Hidden Holocaust? Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany 1933 – 45*, ed. by Günter Grau and trans. by Patrick Camiller (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1995), pp. 8 – 15 (p. 8); Claudia Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians During the Third Reich*, trans. by Allison Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) p. 10; William J. Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies: Rethinking Homosexuality Under National Socialism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 46.
[38] Claudia Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, p. 20.
[39] Ibid., p. 23.
[40] Kirchknopf, 'The Anschluss', pp. 41 – 42.

with raids and denunciations, meant that many lesbians feared and experienced persecution.[41] Nazism's propaganda drive encouraging pronatalism and promoting the sacrosanctity of both traditional family life and heteronormativity for German women also exacerbated this. Thus, and though lesbianism remained legal because, as Samuel Clowes Huneke explains, 'the regime never perceived female homosexuals as a threat to its imagined racial community,' many self-identified lesbians and queer women lived in fear under Nazism.[42] Some even entered into marriages of convenience in order to disguise their queerness.

II. Testimonial Silence

Despite Nazism's extensive persecution of homosexual men and its hostility toward lesbian and queer women between 1933 – 1945, the testimonial literature produced by those who survived the Holocaust has been minimal. In Kai Hammermaister's words, while 'the suffering of the Jews is commemorated in works like those of Anne Frank, Primo Levi and Eli Wiesel, we know of no comparable gay narratives.'[43] A small number of accounts authored by gay men who were incarcerated under the Nazi regime explicitly for their homosexuality, among them Austrian Catholic Heinz Heger's *The Men with the Pink Triangle: The True Life-and-Death of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps* (1972) and French Catholic Pierre Seel's *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual: A Memoir of Nazi Terror* (1994), have been produced. Gad Beck's memoir, *An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin*, was also published in 1995, though in spite of his account's title, Beck was in fact interned in a Jewish transit camp in Berlin in 1945 for

[41]Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, p. 11.
[42] Samuel Clowes Huneke, 'The Duplicity of Tolerance: Lesbian Experiences in Nazi Berlin', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 54:1 (Apr., 2019), 30 – 59 (p. 5).
[43] Hammermeister, 'Inventing History', p. 19.

his work with a Jewish underground movement, and not for his homosexuality. No testimonies written by self-identifying lesbian survivors of the Holocaust have been published since the end of the Second World War.

Moreover, it might be assumed that at least some of the Holocaust's victims and survivors incarcerated for their Jewishness, for example, or for their political or resistance activities or other 'offenses,' may have been queer-identifying, or might have participated in some form of same-sex intimacy, romance or sexual activity during the war. Yet though some male and female memoirists claim to have witnessed same-sex couplings between other prisoners during their own incarcerations, none admit to having personally engaged in this activity themselves. Many, in fact, as will be seen later in this chapter, write of same-sex sexual relationships among the Holocaust's victims emphatically and prejudicially, framing their participants as deviant, criminal and violently abusive.

This narrative silence can be attributed to multiple factors. In the first instance, under the pre-1935 Paragraph 175 statutes, reinstated after World War Two's end, male homosexuality remained illegal in East Germany until the late 1950s, and was only partially reformed to decriminalise sex between men over the age of 21 in West Germany in 1969. Gay men who survived the Holocaust and were liberated from Nazi institutions only to return to Germany suffered under the continued reinforcement of the statute, and were often reincarcerated in German prisons.[44] More than that, both the East and West German governments refused to recognise the suffering of gay Holocaust survivors, and, unlike their Jewish counterparts, they were not entitled to reparations. Consequently, gay men, both those who had been deported and those who had escaped detection, were largely unwilling – or too afraid – to tell their Holocaust stories to a public, and generally

[44] Richard Plant argues that in the post-war years, the 'climate of the Cold War […] was not conducive to eliminating all traces of Nazi jurisprudence.' Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, pp. 13 – 14.

homophobic, audience. This much is made evident by the scant survivor literature. Though Heger's account was published relatively early on, he felt it important to write under a pseudonym; his birth name was Josef Kohout. Pierre Seel, on the other hand, returned to France after the war, where homosexual relations between adults and minors remained illegal until 1982. It is thus unsurprising that his memoir was not published until 1994. Gad Beck's account did not emerge in German until 1995, and in English translation in 2000.

Though lesbianism was not criminalised in East or West Germany under the reinstated Paragraph 175 statutes after 1945, there remained social stigma toward it and continued discrimination against lesbians and queer women in both states. Schoppmann credits this with the dearth of lesbian narratives of the Holocaust: 'because of continuing discriminations, lesbians have left few personal accounts of their experiences in the Third Reich, and it is difficult to find any who are willing to be interviewed about it.'[45] Additionally, under the Nazi regime lesbians and queer women who were incarcerated were largely arrested for other 'offenses,' such as Jewishness, political or resistance activity, criminality or prostitution. Those, on the other hand, who engaged in same-sex sex or intimacy during imprisonment may not necessarily have self-identified as lesbian or queer before, during or after the war. As a result, both types of survivors may have felt that the parts of their Holocaust stories that pertained to sexuality did not belong to the history of the Holocaust. Schoppmann too identifies these as reasons for the testimonial silence of queer women, observing that:

> even though the women described displayed this [lesbian] behaviour in camp, to conclude that they assigned themselves a lesbian identity outside the camp would not be accurate.

[45] Claudia Schoppmann, *National Socialist Sexual Policy and Female Homosexuality* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1997), p. 178.

> Nor would it be correct to conclude – as is sometimes assumed – that they had been arrested due to their homosexuality.[46]

Furthermore, it was not only a distinct anti-gay European landscape, one according to Hammermeister, of wilful ignorance and prejudice, that contributed to this silence.[47] As Erik Jensen points out, 'immediately after the war, neither an unrestricted gay and lesbian press nor a large, organized gay and lesbian community that might memorialize its persecution existed in either West Germany or the United States.'[48] Similarly, Holocaust historiography has, until recent years, neglected to thoughtfully treat matters of queer sexuality in survivor accounts. Listening to the voices and commemorating the suffering of the Holocaust's queer victims and survivors was not a political or scholarly priority in the post-war West.

However, some heterosexual (or at the very least, not openly gay or queer) male survivors do represent the sexual relationships of other prisoners in their memoirs, though as aforementioned, none admit to having partaken in consensual queer sexual activities themselves. Polish Jewish survivor, Alter Wiener, survived five concentration camps after his deportation to Blechhammer forced labour camp at the age of 15. In his 2007 account, he claims that 'in slave labour camps, living conditions left no room for sexual activity or even salacious thoughts […] In that environment where there was absolutely no privacy, I did not notice in any inmates engaging in recreational sex.'[49] Similarly, in *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl goes as far as to explain that in the men's camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau:

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[46] Schoppmann, '"This Kind of Love"', p. 82.
[47] Hammermeister, 'Inventing History', *The German Quarterly*, p. 19.
[48] Erik N. Jensen, 'The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbians, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11:1/2 (Jan. – Apr., 2002), 319 – 349 (p. 321).
[49] Alter Wiener, *64735 From a Name to a Number: A Holocaust Survivor's Autobiography* (Milton Keynes: Author House, 2008), p. 217.

> the sexual urge was generally absent. […] as opposed to all other strictly male establishments – such as army barracks – there was little sexual perversion. Even in his dreams the prisoner did not seem to concern himself with sex, although his frustrated emotions and his finer, higher feelings did find definite expression in them.[50]

Yet the stances of Wiener and Frankl are the exception and not the rule.

Polish Jewish artist Joseph Bau was transported to the Płaszów concentration camp in 1942 after time spent in the Kraków ghetto. He was later transferred to Gross-Rosen and then to the Brünnlitz labour camp in Czechoslovakia. He discusses the inevitability of romance in forced labour and concentrations camps in his 1982 memoir, *Dear God, Have You Ever Gone Hungry?* He recalls that in Płaszów:

> behind the stern appearance, behind the killings, hunger, and fear, there was a difference – an aura of romance. Sex was not in open evidence, as it was not of utmost concern, but nature followed its course and love existed, albeit clandestinely. […] When the SS caught a couple making love […] the punishment was a double execution.[51]

For Bau personally, love did indeed exist. During his incarceration in the camp he met and began a relationship with 19-year-old Jewish prisoner Rebecca Tannenbaum. The couple shared their first kiss behind the camp's latrines, and they were unofficially married in the women's camp. Though the pair were separated for the remainder of the war, they were later reunited and officially married in 1946. Others too include similar memories in their accounts. Philip Bialowitz, a Polish Jewish survivor of the Sobibor extermination camp, to which he was deported in April 1943, claims that even there, where most prisoners were murdered within a few hours of arrival, romantic and sexual

[50] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 44.
[51] Joseph Bau, *Dear God, Have You Ever Gone Hungry?*, trans. by Shlomo "Sam" Yurman (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), p. 134.

relationships occurred. He writes that 'men […] frequently sneak in and out of the women's barracks to visit their girlfriends. Sometimes they make love there.'[52]

Similarly, Elie Wiesel recalls in his memoir, *Night*, that in Auschwitz-Monowitz on a Sunday morning in 1944 he was taken to work with his labour gang in an electrical warehouse at the insistence of his *kapo*, Idek. He remembers finding that strange because he did not usually work on Sundays. He recalls that, upon walking around the warehouse in search of bread:

> I heard a noise coming from a little room next door. I went up and saw Idek and a young Polish girl, half-naked, on a mattress. Then I understood why Idek had refused to let us stay in the camp. Moving a hundred prisoners so that he could lie with a girl! It struck me as so funny that I burst out laughing.[53]

Primo Levi, on the other hand, describes a system at work at Auschwitz-Monowitz of 'prize-coupons,' which should have been distributed to the best workers but more often than not ended up 'in the hands of the Kapos and of the Prominents,' circulating 'on the market in the form of money.'[54] He claims that the value of the prize-coupon would fluctuate, and that one particular 'boom period occurred for a singular reason: the arrival of a fresh contingent of robust Polish girls in place of old inmates of the Frauenblock [brothel].'[55] Levi's suggestion that the value of camp currency increased when it could buy entry to the camp's brothel as it gained a new contingency of Polish women implies that for male prisoners, and particularly those with a relative degree of privilege or in a position of authority, sexuality remained intact to some degree. For these male survivors,

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[52] Philip Bialowitz, with Joseph Bialowitz, *Promise at Sobibór: A Jewish Boy's Story of Revolt and Survival in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), p. 90. Sobibor extermination camp was located in east Poland close to the Sobibór railway station. Unlike concentration camps, extermination camps such as this existed explicitly for the extermination of Europe's Jewry, and most who entered were immediately murdered in gas chambers, though a small number were kept alive to aid with the operation of the camp. Other Nazi extermination camps include Treblinka, Belzec, and Auschwitz.
[53] Wiesel, *The Night Trilogy*, p. 64.
[54] Levi, *If This is a Man*, p. 86.
[55] Ibid.

at least, the explicit representation of heterosexual intimacy among prisoners is a distinct element of their accounts.

Among women memoirists, portrayals of intimacy, sex and eroticism among prisoners are much rarer; where such themes do exist, they are typically alluded to or depicted euphemistically. Exceptions to this rule tend to be found either, as explained in Chapter 1, in the women's accounts published in the immediate post-war years, or more rarely, in those published most recently. Gisella Perl, for instance, claims in her 1948 memoir, that the latrines of Auschwitz-Birkenau served as a hub for clandestine sexual activity and a market in which sex was traded for goods. She writes:

> Openly, shamelessly, the dirty, diseased bodies clung together for a minute or two in the fetid atmosphere of the latrine – and the piece of bread, the comb, the little knife wandered from the pocket of the man into the greedy hands of the woman. […] Millions were dying on their feet eaten up alive by lice, hunger, disease – and in the latrines, lying in human excrement before the eyes of their fellow prisoners, men and women were writhing in sexual paroxysm.[56]

In her 2020 memoir, *Franci's War: A Woman's Story of Survival*, Czech Jewish dressmaker Franci Rabinek Epstein, who survived the Theresienstadt ghetto, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, writes unflinchingly about both the sexual abuse and consensual sexual activity she claims to have witnessed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In the 1970s when her account was written, Rabinek Epstein could not find a willing publisher for it. Only in 2020 did her daughter, journalist Helen Epstein, finally succeed in having her mother's account published. Rabinek Epstein claims, for instance, that in the family camp of Birkenau, in which men and women lived together but in separate barracks, that '[f]lirting and necking had […] evolved into outright prostitution.'[57] She even describes her own physical intimacy with an Italian prisoner name Bruno, with whom she met secretly one

[56] Ibid., p. 56.
[57] Franci Rabinek Epstein, *Franic's War: A True Story* (London: Michael Joseph, 2020), p. 101.

evening: 'Bruno momentarily forgot his brotherly feelings and became very passionate. [I] did not exactly put up a stiff fight, but when it came to the moment of giving in completely, [I] froze rigid.'[58]

Perhaps most surprisingly of all, there is even a thematic insistence upon sexuality in the written accounts of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Sonderkommando.[59] These men produced their eyewitness testimonies – often referred to contemporarily as the scrolls of Auschwitz – during their imprisonment, and buried them on the grounds of Auschwitz. It was hoped that, in the future, the testimonies would be discovered and read, and act as evidence of the atrocities committed at Birkenau. In their study of the Sonderkommando manuscripts, Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams argue that 'many of the conventional understandings of Holocaust writing (that the Shoah went unwitnessed, that its victims lost all sense of self, that they were essentially sexless) must be called into question,' for the written accounts of both victims and survivors often contradict these assumptions.[60] Quoted in the monograph are passages from the writings of Sonderkommando member Zalman Gradowski, who claims of women brought to the gas chamber:

> a few fall on us, as if drunk, as if in love, throw themselves into our arms and ask us, with embarrassed glances, to undress them. They want to forget everything now, they don't want to think about anything now. […] Their bodies, they alone, they still feel, they sense still. … And therefore they want that their young bodies, which strongly pulse with life blood, the hand of an unknown man, who is now the nearest and dearest there, to touch, caress their bodies now. And in this way they feel as if the hand of their lover of husband were stroking or caressing their bodies inflamed with passion.[61]

[58] Ibid., p. 129.
[59] Sonderkommandos were work units in Nazi death camps made up of male prisoners. They were forced to help with the disposal of the corpses of gas chamber victims. They were usually kept segregated from the rest of the camp population, and almost all Sonderkommandos were regularly gassed to death and replaced with new arrivals.
[60] Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams, *Matters of Testimony: Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), p. 85.
[61] Zalman Gradowski 'A levondike nakht', *In harts fun gehenem*, p. 72, cited in Williams and Chare, *Matter of Testimony*, p. 78.

Not only does Gradowski imply that some of the women sought to satiate their sexual desires in a last instance of human connection, but he reveals in his 'aching prose' 'a sexual response' to the bodies of the desperate women condemned to death.[62]

Yet it is striking how few male survivors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, testify to having witnessed or partaken in homosexual relationships during their incarceration. Those who do depict such relationships do so fleetingly and with distaste. Wiesel, for instance, briefly claims that his tent leader in Auschwitz-Monowitz was fond of children: 'he had bread brought for them, some soup and margarine. (Actually, this was not disinterested affection: there was a considerable traffic in children among homosexuals here, I learned later.)'[63] Sam Pivnik, a Polish Jewish man deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with his family in August 1943, describes his first horrifying night in the camp, going as far as to document his own rape by another camp inmate:

> I felt a rhythmic rubbing from behind and half turned to see a face leering in the darkness. He was a man in his forties […] I didn't know his name and had never spoken to him and here he was, taking advantage of this bizarre night to bugger me. I couldn't believe that anyone could think of this after all we'd been through, but he clearly had other ideas and I felt my arse suddenly wet.[64]

Unusually, Roman Frister graphically details an instance in which, he claims, he used sex as currency in Auschwitz in his memoir. He explains:

> I chewed Arpad Basci's bread for about two months before the time came for my final payments on his crusts. […] His hand roamed my body, a shaky finger searching for the entrance. Smeared with lard, it easily found my anus and corkscrewed into it. […] his penis rammed into me with a single quick thrust. The pain was terrible.'[65]

[62] Williams and Chare, eds., *Matters of Testimony*, pp. 78 – 79.
[63] Wiesel, *The Night Trilogy*, p. 48.
[64] Sam Pivnik, *Survivor: Auschwitz, The Death March and My Fight for Freedom* (London: Hodder, 2013), p 92.
[65] Frister, *The Cap: The Price of a Life*, p. 238.

On the whole, these descriptions equate homosexuality with deviancy, abuse, or criminality; none of these male writers claim to have witnessed loving, consensual homosexual relationships during their incarcerations. Much like their female counterparts, as will be seen, the prejudicial tones with which these authors depict homosexuality in Nazi institutions contrasts sharply with their portrayals of heterosexual intimacy.

III. Women's Accounts: The Identity of the Witness

Many women's Holocaust testimonies that deal, in part, with sexual relationships between concentration camp prisoners of the same sex are imbued with a disapproving and overtly anti-lesbian tone. While some authors situate women's queer relationships within a wider framework of sexualised violence and exploitation, others condemn them as preternatural and abnormal. In her 1997 account, Fania Fénelon dissociates from the queer sex acts she claims to have witnessed in Birkenau through the stigmatisation or 'othering' of her subjects. She describes a non-Jewish 'homosexual' trio in her barracks as 'strange and repugnant.'[66] She goes on, with abhorrence, to write of '[t]he discreditable couplings of whores with *kapos* and block superintendents whose physiques were often closer to those of beasts than men.'[67] Fénelon's is not an isolated attitude. Olga Lengyel describes in her testimony the queer women in Auschwitz-Birkenau as 'perverts,' many of whom, she claims, 'discovered their lesbian predilections through an association with corruption.'[68] Though she goes on to concede that perhaps her 'disgust was groundless under the circumstances,' the author's apparent discomfort with, and aversion to, queer

[66] Fénelon, *Playing for Time*, p. 145.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, pp. 197 - 198.

relationships in the 'Dantesque world of Birkenau' is foregrounded.[69] Working to separate herself from the categories of 'lesbians' she claims existed in the camp, Lengyel writes:

> As in all prisons, Birkenau had its perverts. Among the women there were three categories. Those who were lesbians by instinct formed the least interesting group. More troublesome was the second classification, which included women who, because of the abnormal conditions, suffered changes in their sexual viewpoint. Often they yielded under the pressure of necessity.
>
> We had a Polish woman, about forty, who had once been a professor of physics. […] One of the prisoners, a functionary, paid particular court to this lovely, delicate, and intelligent woman. The professor knew that if she responded she would at least be spared from hunger. She must have fought a great battle against the temptation, but in the end, she surrendered. Six weeks later she was referring to her "friend" with much enthusiasm. In another two months she declared she could not live without her consort.
>
> In the third category were those who, unlike my Polish acquaintance, discovered their lesbian predilections through an association with corruption.[70]

In labelling the women of all three categories as 'perverts,' Lengyel creates a narrative split between them and herself, othering them as sexual deviants and criminals.

Though she does not seem to show more distaste toward one particular category of women, Lengyel does explain that the women who were not 'lesbians by instinct' were engaging in same-sex relationships either as a survival strategy or because of a connection with immorality. Thus, despite her acknowledgement that the Polish professor of physics seemed to develop a genuine bond with, and love for, the functionary who had courted her, and in spite of her inability to know the woman's true motives and feelings, Lengyel focuses on speculating about the possible exploitative nature of the relationship. By emphasising her claim that the professor entered into the courtship solely to 'be spared from hunger,' Lengyel implies that the relationship was grounded in vice and an exploitative power imbalance. She also makes clear her assumption that 'normal' women

[69] Ibid., p. 199, p. 198.
[70] Ibid., pp. 198 – 199.

would only enter into a same-sex partnership reluctantly. Moreover, it is notable that Lengyel describes queerness in the camp using the language of war and violence. The words 'great battle' and 'surrendered' imply that the queerness of the functionary, at least, was both predatory and oppressive and that, just as war has victims, the professor fell victim to the aggressive courtship of the functionary, despite resistance. In likening the functionary's persistent advances to a 'battle,' Lengyel echoes the rhetoric that underpinned the homophobic elements of Nazi sexual policy: that is, the rhetoric expressed in an NSDAP response to a Scientific Humanitarian Committee questionnaire distributed in 1928, that 'whoever so much thinks of male-male or female-female love is our enemy.'[71]

This stigmatisation, at least in the retelling of experience, sees Fénelon and Lengyel simultaneously positioning and identifying themselves in opposition to the queerness they describe and underpinning their own claims to normalcy. In his writings on stigmatisation, sociologist Erving Goffman emphasises how an attribute that stigmatises one individual can validate the ordinariness of another.[72] Or, as Andrew Dalton explains it, 'stigma creates a boundary between "us" and "them", confirming a moral superiority of the stigmatising group and reinforcing their claim to normalcy. Importantly, the stigmatising of "others" is an identity-producing act.'[73] What emerges from these accounts, then, is the narrative creation and normalisation of identities through the persistence of discriminatory, anti-queer attitudes. This phenomenon has been observed by Schoppmann in her exploration of representations of lesbianism in survivor memoirs, but has also been attributed more widely by scholars to generally unfavourable

[71] *Der Eigne*, no.8, cited in Rudolf Klare, *Homosexualität und Strafrecht* (Hamburg, 1937), cited in Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, p. 7.
[72] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1963), p. 12.
[73] Andrew Dalton, "'Just take a tablet and you'll be okay": medicalization, the growth of stigma and the silencing of HIV', *HIV Nursing*, no. 17 (2017), 63 – 68 (p. 63).

twentieth century attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. In his article on the complex and varying social psychological functions of homophobia, for instance, Gregory Herek states that 'symbolic sexual attitudes express the feeling that cherished values are being violated,' and that such attitudes 'express values important to one's concept of self, thereby helping individuals to establish their identity and affirm their notion of the sort of person they perceive themselves to be.'[74] In stigmatising the queer women of the camps in the very act of retelling, Fénelon and Lengyel are able to bolster ordinary and virtuous self-images.

IV. Fear and Sexualised Power

The most prominent reason for the reproachful attitudes of the survivors towards queer behaviours, as documented in their narratives, however, is fear that they posed an explicit physical threat, and an implicit, and perhaps more insidious, moral threat to the author and other inmates. This stigmatisation because of the perceived, and in some cases, actual threat that queer women – who were, according to many memoirists, often German criminal or asocial prisoners in positions of authority – posed to other prisoners, must not be overlooked. Certainly, many women recall that some *kapos* and block functionaries were both cruel and sexually predatory, and instilled fear into the inmates in their charge through the use of sexualised power. This goes some way towards explaining the prejudicial attitudes of the memoirists, who widely document having felt assaulted by more privileged and predatory prisoners, or recall others engaging in what Na'ama Shik

[74] Gregory Herek, 'Beyond "Homophobia": A Social Psychological Perspective', in *Homophobia: An Overview*, ed. by John P. De Cecco (New York: The Haworth Press, 1984), pp. 1 – 22 (p. 12).

describes as 'sexual exchange,' a means by which sex was used as a commodity, traded for food, improved living conditions or another means of survival.[75]

This fear, which insists upon a direct link between the assumed criminality of some of the camp *kapos* and their apparent sexual exploitation of underprivileged prisoners, is a persistent trope returned to by many women survivors in their accounts. In her memoir, Sara Nomberg-Przytyk claims of her Auschwitz block *kapo*, Bubi, that:

> [w]e feared her as much as we feared the SS men. She used to come in often to flirt with Orli. She was a lesbian. We all knew about it and we were afraid of her, but were also repelled by her flirtations.[76]

It is striking here that Nomberg-Przytyk's comparison of the fear-invoking powers of the block *kapo* to that of the sadistic SS guards is followed by a statement about Bubi's sexual behaviour and her presumed sexual identity. Through the juxtaposition of allusions to Bubi's violent nature and the categorisation of her as a lesbian, Nomberg-Przytyk suggests that, for her, at least in the retelling of experience, the *kapo's* sexuality was as threatening as her position of authority.

Comparably, and somewhat more overtly, Paul Steinberg, a German Jewish man deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943, claims that homosexual men in the camp invoked terror in other inmates. He claims that men's same-sex relationships in Auschwitz were 'a common practice,' and admits that he was even suspected of having a sexual relationship with his friend Pollack.[77] He recalls that homosexuality was treated

[75] Na'ama Shik, 'Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau', in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, ed. by Dagmar Herzog (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 221 – 246 (p. 239).
[76] Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz: True Tales*, p. 92.
[77] Paul Steinberg, *Speak You Also: A Survivor's Reckoning*, trans. by Linda Coverdale with Bill Ford (New York: Picador USA, 2001), p. 150.

as deviant in Birkenau, and was so rife that '[a]ny affectionate relationship between a powerful and a weaker person seemed suspect.'[78] He writes that:

> [s]till others – and you had to watch out for them – loved young flesh and were on the lookout for a sex object. The camp was a gigantic market of homosexuality. All those criminals, idle and well fed, were deprived of women and fantasized nonstop. […] The constant danger was their psychopathic instability, for they were all genuinely crazy, and even those who knew them best were unable to predict their outbursts of violence.[79]

For Steinberg in his memoir, homosexuality and criminality are synonymous. Like Nomberg-Przytyk, Steinberg emphasises his fear of the privileged prisoners in positions of authority, 'all those criminals,' who, sexually speaking, claims Steinberg, posed a threat of 'constant danger' to those less privileged. Moreover, Steinberg's description of the camp as a 'gigantic market of homosexuality,' sees him reduce queer camp partnerships to instances of sexual exchange or barter, rather than those of love and intimacy, or to coercive relationships of abuse that, he claims, created a fearful, anti-gay atmosphere among the wider prisoner population.

Olga Lengyel, who depicts types of '"dance soirees" that were sometimes organised at Auschwitz-Birkenau for *kapos* and functionaries, also claims to have feared those in the camp that she classifies as lesbians. She explains that:

> [d]uring these orgies the couples who danced together gradually became attached to each other. Some of the women assumed male attire to lend an air of reality to the proceedings.
>
> One of the chief initiators of these soirees was a Polish countess […] she looked exactly like a male. […] In her general behaviour and mannerisms the countess acted like a man. […] she opened a siege of courtship. I actually had to run to escape her. […] On many occasions, I was awakened by kisses and caresses. The countess! It got to the point where I was afraid to sleep during the dances. The others were amused by her ardent courtship, but I was not. […] But perhaps my disgust was groundless under the circumstances. The horrible distractions provided a few hours or forgetfulness, and that in itself was worth almost anything in the camp.[80]

[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., pp. 88 – 89.
[80] Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, pp. 198 – 199.

Lengyel here describes the bodies of the women as almost merging into one another as they danced, and undermines the authenticity of the same-sex couplings through her suggestion that, for the partnerships to be more realistic, one of the party had to don men's clothing. Furthermore, though she shows a level of sympathy for prisoners who, she claims, sought to find comfort in physical relationships with one another, Lengyel is clear in stating her position as observer of, rather than participant in, these relationships, labelling them as perverted despite the fact that this passage is included, paradoxically, in a chapter entitled 'Love in the Shadow of the Crematory.' Her attitude toward same-sex relationships stands firmly in opposition to that which she expresses toward the genuinely loving heterosexual relationships she claims to have witnessed bloom. 'Nature dictates that wherever men and women are together there shall also be love. Even in the shadow of the crematory the emotions could not be entirely suppressed,' she explains.[81] Lengyel emphasises, moreover, feeling assaulted by, and fearful of, the predatory advances of the countess, which she terms 'a siege.' Though it is noteworthy that the author considers that her revulsion may have been unjustified, and implies that the distraction the relationships provided the women was both natural and admissible, she foregrounds her own terror at the advances of the countess.

V. Defensive Attitudes: Fear and Curiosity

Yet it is important that the fearful, hostile and often prejudicial manner in which these writers portray sexual relationships between women not be reduced, by way of heterosexist assumption, to merely reflections of what Katrin Sieg describes as the

[81] Ibid., p. 195.

association of 'lesbianism with fascist aggression.'[82] While many women memoirists claim to have feared queer women and queer sexuality more generally for this reason, other women's descriptions of same-sex relationships imply their contemplations about, and discomfort with, their own sexualities. Informed by psychodynamic theory, some twentieth century philosophers, such as Theodor Adorno, contend that prejudicial attitudes toward gender and sexual nonconformism work to minimise anxiety rooted in unconscious conflict. In 1984, Herek categorised these types of hostilities as 'defensive attitudes,' explaining that they

> function when an individual perceives some analogy between homosexual persons and her or his own unconscious conflicts. […] Such a strategy permits people to externalize the conflicts and to reject their own unacceptable urges by rejecting lesbians and gay men (who symbolize those urges) without consciously recognizing the urges as their own. Since contact with homosexual persons threatens to make conscious those thoughts that have been repressed, it inevitably arouses anxiety in defensive individuals.[83]

This explanation of belligerence toward individuals identifying as lesbians or gay men, or even those whose sexuality could not strictly be classified as heterosexual, appears, to an extent, to correlate with the defensive depictions of queer women and their relationships in many Holocaust testimonies, particularly given some authors' thematic insistence upon fear and their ambiguous use of language. This is not to suggest that the writers here studied identify as queer themselves. Rather, it is to contend that their accounts can be interpreted as concerned, on an implicit and subtextual level, with acknowledging and alluding to the authors' sexualities and sexual anxieties, particularly as inspired by recalling and portraying sex acts between other women.

[82] Katrin Sieg, 'Sexual Desire and Social Transformations in *Aimée & Jaguar*', *Signs*, 28:1 (2002), 303 – 331 (p. 315).
[83] Herek, 'Beyond 'Homophobia,' p. 10.

I Came Back, Krystyna Żywulska's 1946 account of her years spent in Polish prison, the Pawiak, and then Auschwitz-Birkenau, reads as particularly ambiguous. While scouring Auschwitz for recognisable faces, Żywulska claims to have unwittingly found herself in the camp latrines. She recalls the scene that she there witnessed:

> Sitting on the boards in the space between, was a mannish looking German woman, a black *winkel*. On her knees sat a very feminine girl with long hair. She gazed at her partner with rapture, then she kissed her on the mouth. It was a long kiss. You couldn't imagine anything more revolting. This kind of 'love' in these surroundings. I rushed out and ran across the *wiese*, feeling revolted and dirty. The other women were killing lice. I also began to itch – something was crawling all over me. I put my hand inside my belt and found something. The first louse. I did not know how to kill it.[84]

The author's response to this scene is complex. On the one hand, the opprobrium in her narrative allows Żywulska to retrospectively place herself in a position of moral superiority, and on the periphery of the deviant sex acts she claims to have taken place between the couple. Her descriptions of the woman wearing the black triangle (a marker attached by the SS to asocial prisoners who were, among women, often prostitutes or known lesbians) as 'mannish,' and the woman without a black triangle as 'feminine,' see Żywulska reinforce the notion that queerness in the camps – and in this instance, the gender nonconformity that accompanied it – was often interchangeable with sexual predation and criminality.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that Żywulska follows her portrayal of this 'revolting' sex act with the claim that she felt unclean and itchy, and the notion of disease as spread by lice. She does not begin a new paragraph, and thus, suggests that the two experiences – the observation of the couple and her own itchiness – were linked, that the latter was a direct result of the former. What is more, the ambiguity of Żywulska's language here implies double meaning. While her reference to the unidentified

[84] Żywulska, *I Came Back*, p. 61.

'something' 'crawling all over' her might well apply to the louse that, for some reason, she claims to have not known how to kill, it also reads as implying of sexual anxiety, or perhaps even sexual arousal, that Żywulska suggests she struggled to suppress. Certainly, her claim that the itch plaguing her originated beneath her belt could be interpreted as a thinly-veiled admission of arousal or queer desire. As such, this passage presents as one of fear rooted in anxieties about elements of Żywulska's own sexuality. She simultaneously acknowledges both an angst about queer sexuality – and seemingly her possible lack of immunity to it – as well as a curiosity toward it. Żywulska's discomfort, expressed through the image of parasite infestation, appears to concurrently stem from being witness to – and retelling – the sex between the couple, and her own feelings in relation to, or inspired by, that which she claims to have seen.

Żywulska's use of the somewhat medicalised language of epidemic and parasitological threat to express such anxieties is not unique, and is, in fact, a relatively recurrent characteristic of women's memoirs that describe queer relationships. Many of the authors partake, linguistically, in what medical sociologist Peter Conrad describes as the procedure by which nonmedical problems – in this case, sexual relationships between women – are 'defined in medical terms, described using medical language, understood through the adaptation of a medical framework.'[85] While this is unsurprising, particularly given the fact that the Holocaust took place in an age of eugenics and National Socialist discourse centred upon the importance of heredity, it may also be demonstrative of deeper personal discomfort regarding sexuality.

The medicalisation of matters pertaining to sexuality is particularly striking in Nanda Herbermann's testimony, *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate #6582 in Ravensbrück*

[85] Peter Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 4.

Concentration Camp for Women. Herbermann, who was imprisoned in Ravensbrück, recalls with fear and distaste the women of Block II, of which she was made the block elder or "brothel mother" by the camp administration. She writes of the women in her charge, the majority of whom, she claims, were prostitutes:

> If I had been raised in this way, in such an environment and without the blessings and protection of a good parental home like them, then I, too, might have turned out like them. When they had their "moral times," […] then they often threw their arms around my neck and kissed me. I accepted this and repressed my disgust; for I knew that many of them had been afflicted with the most horrible and catching diseases, and that some still were.[86]

Herbermann goes on to call the women of Block II 'totally ruined' and 'dangerous' 'monsters,' explaining that she 'was always afraid of them,' and she later writes that 'they performed the most depraved acts with each other, since sexuality was the only thing left for them.'[87] Though here Herbermann does not suggest that the affection of the women toward her was sexually predatory, or indeed, sexual at all, her dislike for them combined with her insistence that the sex acts they engaged in were 'depraved' is certainly prejudicial and at times, fearful. Furthermore, her deployment of the term 'dangerous' and her apparent anxiety that some of the women were afflicted with unspecified and likely sexually transmitted 'catching diseases' see her invoke fears that both their sexual deviancy and their physical illnesses may have been contagious, or even perhaps, that the two were of the same ilk. In a manner akin to Żywulska, therefore, Herbermann medicalises, and makes synonymous, the women's sexuality and their association with criminality and immorality. In so doing, she suggests that the nature of her fear of them stemmed from concerns about her own lack of immunity to the threat of their moral and physical 'diseases.'

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[86] Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, p. 136.
[87] Ibid., pp. 136 – 137.

It is also significant that Herbermann's anxieties over the sexuality and implied promiscuity of the women seems to be rooted in her own personal anxieties. The author's admittance that she 'accepted' the women's embraces and 'repressed' her disgust, particularly given the role of repression in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, is illuminating. In *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, Richard Langton Gregory explains that, in terms of psychoanalysis, repression is understood as a defence mechanism which 'ensures that what is unacceptable to the conscious mind, and would if recalled arouse anxiety, is prevented from entering into it.'[88] In his study of homophobia, and particularly his exploration of defensive attitudes, Herek echoes this, claiming that by externalising – repressing and projecting – unconscious inner conflicts about one's own sexuality, it is believed that individuals work to minimise the tension they may cause.[89] Given these explanations, Herbermann's fear and admitted need to repress her disgust, particularly when faced with the notion of physical intimacy with the women of Block II, appear ambiguous. Indeed, such fright can be read as both a reflection of anxieties about criminality and immorality, as well as a level of personal discomfort regarding matters of sexuality and sexual promiscuity.

In her 1987 account, *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*, which chronicles her arrest for assisting the Polish resistance movement and the four years she spent in Ravensbrück, Polish physician and Roman Catholic Wanda Półtawska also writes at length about the sexual relationships between women that she claims to have witnessed. She recalls that in March of 1942 herself and camp friend, Krysia, were moved to Block II, which, she claims, due to the behaviours of its inhabitants, was known among inmates as ''elel' –

[88] Richard Langton Gregory, *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, *Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 803.
[89] Herek, 'Beyond Homophobia', p. 10.

LL – the initials of lesbian love.'[90] In describing the block and its prisoners in overt tones of condemnation and repugnance, Półtawska insists that the sex acts taking place caused her distress. She even goes as far as to represent the block as a place of apocalypse, a space in which such sordid, inhuman acts occurred that humanity itself was beginning to be extinguished within its confines. This is made clear in her descriptions of Block II as 'Hell' and a 'hideous, inhuman reality,' and her claim that 'life in that block crushed us totally, extinguished us.'[91] Such severe opprobrium, however, of the relationships between women in the block, appears extreme and somewhat hyperbolic, particularly in light of the fact that in Ravensbrück human life was quite literally 'extinguished' on a daily basis through starvation, violence and disease. Moreover, though Półtawska's depiction of women's sexual relationships and the block that housed them is of the most extreme in its hostility, it is also, somewhat paradoxically, unusually extensive and particularly suggestive.

Like Żywulska, Półtawska compares the development of same-sex relationships in the block, and particularly those that, she suggests, involved participants who may have initially been reluctant, to naturally occurring phenomena, such as disease and natural disaster. She recalls that with regards to same-sex attraction, '[w]omen who at first had recoiled in disgust, little by little gave up the unequal struggle. It spread like a plague… like a bush-fire… like a consuming passion.'[92] She even poses the question to herself, 'a couple of years from now, will we be like that too?'[93] Interestingly, Półtawska's comparison of the spread of same-sex attraction to a 'plague' sees her addressing fears that queerness is in some way infectious, or suggesting that she may have been

[90] Wanda Półtawska, *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*, trans. by Mary Craig (New York: Hippocrene Books, 2013), p. 57.
[91] Ibid., pp. 57 – 9.
[92] Ibid., p. 58.
[93] Ibid.

defenceless against contracting it. Moreover, her final comparison, 'consuming passion,' is not only naturally occurring, but is simultaneously symbolic of suffering and pain, as in its religious definition, and unbridled – and possibly pleasurable – emotion, as in its sexual definition. The author's apparent distress, therefore, conveyed through the use of medicalised language, presents as linked to inner conflict regarding her own sexuality; she appears, in the retelling of experience, to allude to her own liability to queerness, to her own susceptibility to catching the plague-like sexualities of the other women in the block.

Furthermore, despite Półtawska's overly defensive claim that she 'wanted no part in' the sexual acts taking place in Block II, it is further illuminating that she claims to have felt the need to change the manner in which she interacted with her friend Krysia on entering the block.[94] Półtawska explains that:

> I don't really know if Krysia understood why I stopped giving her a goodnight kiss. Maybe she even resented my doing so. But the incredible goings-on in that block destroyed my faith in the innocence of even the simplest human gesture. I gave up believing in affection or purity.[95]

She later writes that Krysia 'cried for a long time that night and never again came to say goodnight to me in bed; at least not in the same way as before.'[96] Such admittances suggest that it was not only the relationships between other women that frightened both the author and Krysia, but the nature of their own relationship or feelings for one another. For indeed, Półtawska implies that she questioned the innocence and purity of her own intimacies with Krysia, and draws attention to the undescribed manner in which they had previously said goodnight to one another in bed. Here, the author makes apparent her

[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., p. 59.

anxieties about the chasteness of her own desires and conduct, and the fact that her concern about this was such that she felt impelled to alter her interactions with Krysia altogether.

Półtawska goes on to write ambiguously of her own conduct, and implicitly draws attention to discomfort with her own feelings and behaviours while in Block II. After contemplating the apparent contagious nature of the sexual relationships taking place in the block, Półtawska claims that she watched the relationships that took place at night 'torn between curiosity and despair.'[97] She later claims she 'looked on, terrified,' and even describes the bunk romances as 'awful scenes when they were actually being enacted by our own bedside,' as if she ought to, and could not help but watch, either through proximity or curiosity, or both.[98] Moreover, and though the author insists that she was repulsed by the sex acts taking place in Block II and could not stand to witness them, she references watching, seeing and looking upon them a total of seven times within this two-page passage.

Similarly, though she claims to have felt genuinely assaulted by the 'inviting glances' of Zorita, another woman in the block, she describes the woman as 'a gentle girl, with great, black, velvety eyes,' and claims that, despite her best efforts, she would sometimes 'accidentally catch her eye.'[99] Półtawska's description of Zorita not only frames the woman as attractive, but as tender and agreeable, and thus stands at odds with the author's assertion that to meet her eye 'made me frightened,' unless, of course, the fright stemmed from Półtawska's own desire.[100] Półtawska's need to emphasise the accidental nature of her own gaze at Zorita reads as particularly defensive, especially given the fact that her extreme derogation of the queer women makes the use of the adverb

[97] Ibid., p. 58.
[98] Ibid., pp. 58 – 59.
[99] Ibid., p. 58.
[100] Ibid.

'accidentally' seemingly unnecessary. Półtawska goes on to explain that in Block II: 'The last shreds of humanity were slowly disappearing. Lesbian love… love… love…'[101] While it appears that Półtawska's alliterative repetition of the noun 'love' is here intended to symbolise the ebb of humanity in the sexually deviant concentration camp environment, it also reads as a coded admittance of the development of her curiosity about and receptiveness to women's queer relationships in Block II. She later concedes that she 'soon began to feel sympathy' for the queer women in the block, in a sentence that echoes her observation that others who had 'once recoiled' 'little by little gave up.'[102]

Sentiments that reveal a certain curiosity or desire to watch women's sexual relationships are echoed in the 1948 memoir of Austrian doctor and opponent of National Socialism, Ella Lingens-Reiner, who was a prisoner-doctor in Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which she was deported in February 1943. Lingens-Reiner feels it necessary to explain in her memoir *Prisoners of Fear*, using theatrical language, as though the women of Auschwitz were performing scenes that ought to be observed, that women's sexual 'relationships led to numerous scenes and intrigues.'[103] The extensive detail of Fania Fénelon's portrayals of the sexual activity of the *kapos* at the Auschwitz-Birkenau dance, for which the orchestra provided the music, on the other hand, suggests she watched on intently. She explains how:

> A woman dragged another towards a bed, the *cojas* were filled with couples, sometimes trios. Mouths were riveted to nipples, to mouths, hands scratched a back, a thigh, a cry rolled strangled in a throat, then escaped upwards into freedom. A slap rang out on a cheek, on a buttock. Exhausted and exhausting pantings accompanied the couplings.
>
> […] Everywhere women were hugging, kissing, and caressing, lying flat out on tables, sliding to the floor. In the shadow of the *cojas*, clinging bodies rolled over in their frantic, almost pitiful search for pleasure. Darkness swathed whole portions of the bodies,

[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ella Lingens-Reiner, *Prisoners of Fear*, (London: Gollancz, 1948), p. 107.

> veiling precise gestures. There was a whole range of kisses, from lovebird pecks to octopuslike exchanges, wet, sucking, gurgling. It was unchartered territory.[104]

This scene of passion is made almost indistinguishable from a scene of death. The description of the 'cry rolled strangled in a throat, then escaped upwards into freedom,' is reminiscent of the death rattle released from a corpse, and is simultaneously gruesome and pornographically climactic, while the 'slaps' of cheeks and buttocks lend an air of violence to the scene. The passage, in which the subjects are reduced to mere unidentifiable body parts, and which seems, at its core, to be one concurrently about life and death, appears to recreate a scene that Fénelon wills the reader to watch with an attentiveness akin to her own. Indeed, the fastidious detail with which Fénelon depicts the scene leaves little to the imagination, and implies that the author not only watched on with considerable intrigue, but took pleasure in retrospectively retelling it.

VI. Conclusion

Heterosexist assumptions about women's narrativizations of the Holocaust not only obscure the multiplicity of their perspectives, but categorically overlook the complexity and ambiguity of their narratives. To an extent, such presuppositions are arguably guilty of 'pre-empting the Holocaust.'[105] Though Langer uses the term specifically to denigrate both the widely held belief that the Holocaust carries a beneficial lesson for present-day society, and the gendered study of the event, it also rings true for the risk that contemporary readers will impose their own heterosexism, and associated beliefs, onto writings about the Holocaust. Post-Holocaust remembrance and global memorialisation culture have not only come to create accepted – and largely sexless – Holocaust narratives

[104] Fénelon, *Playing for Time*, p. 220.
[105] Lawrence Langer, *Pre-empting the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 1.

and the notion of the 'ideal victim' of the Holocaust, but have come, as Waxman has pointed out, to construct the identities of women victims around stereotypically feminine roles. Such traditional gendered expectations, often held by both scholars of the Holocaust and the reading public, are undeniably associated with heteronormative ideals that typically exclude considerations of queer sexualities and sexual fluidity. Thus, implicit musings about gender identity and sexuality in women's Holocaust testimonies, and authors' testimonial expression of anxiety regards their stability as conforming to codes of heteronormativity, are overlooked.

Survivors of the Holocaust write testimonies for various reasons. While some do so in order to bear witness to the horrors of the event, and others to memorialise those who did not survive, others still, such as Livia Bitton Jackson, do so in order that their stories may act as '[a] lesson to help future generations prevent the causes of the twentieth-century catastrophe from being transmitted into the twenty-first.'[106] Likewise, the act of writing a testimony, different for each author, is shaped by innumerable social, political and cultural factors, and particularly by personal trauma and accepted Holocaust narratives reinforced by historiography and the canon of survivor literature. Some women writing their testimonies after the event, I posit, may have felt compelled to make their experiences, feelings and narratives compatible with heteronormative expectations. This was arguably especially true for women writing in the immediate post-war years, a time in which, particularly in East and West Germany and Austria, those who identified as queer were likely to face social ostracization.

Yet some women survivors do make apparent in their memoirs, albeit implicitly, allusions to and anxieties about their own sexualities, particularly in the wake of

[106] Livia Bitton Jackson, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust* (Logan: Perfection Learning, 1999), p. 9.

chronicling other women's sexual relationships. In her study of sexuality in Holocaust film, fiction and memoir, Rebecca Scherr argues that 'there exists no Holocaust memoir that centralizes sexuality and eroticism as the focal point of the narrative, since the survivors' words seek to recall a historical and lived experience, an experience that was anything but sexual.'[107] While Scherr's observation is generally accurate, I contend that the accounts here studied illustrate that sexuality, in fact, often plays a more significant role in Holocaust testimony than has, heretofore, been presumed. Krystyna Żywulska suggests in her memoir, for instance, a direct correlation between the nagging itch below her belt and the queer sexual activity she witnessed. The portrayal of the louse she claims to have found beneath her belt immediately after the scene in the latrines, and her disturbance at such a discovery, reads as a camouflaged allusion to her own troublesome sexual arousal. Other testimonies illustrate the split between authors' desires to remain – and be perceived as – innocent and ordinary, and their need to acknowledge their own sexualities, sexual anxieties and sexual responses. Wanda Półtawska insists, in an overly defensive manner, that the sexual activity in Block II destroyed her faith in humanity, yet is nonetheless compelled to insinuate that her own relations with Krysia, and her interactions with other prisoners of the block, were those of desire. Other women, such as Ella Lingens-Reiner and Fania Fénelon, imply a curiosity to watch sex between women in Birkenau grounded in intrigue rather than terror. Fénelon's portrayals of the sex acts that took place at the dance party are particularly explicit.

Authors like Żywulska and Półtawska, however, did not *need* to portray queer relationships in their accounts at all, and it was certainly not necessary for them to imbue their descriptions with double meaning and ambiguity that renders their own responses to same-sex intimacy open to interpretation. Given the constructed nature of retellings of

[107] Scherr, 'The Uses of Memory', p. 290.

the Holocaust, one can only assume that Półtawska's remarks about Zorita's velvety eyes and her own 'accidental' gaze, or Żywulska's allusion to sexual arousal, are consciously included and only somewhat shrouded references to their own sexualities and sexual responses to queerness. To reduce such recollections, and the prejudices, fears and hostilities they are imbued with, merely to reflections on sexualised power and exploitation, or to identity forming acts, is to overlook not only the very words of the survivors themselves, but the spaces between their words. To do so is to impose upon the narratives our own presumptions of heterosexuality, and in turn, obscure the diversity of women's writings and contemplations about sexuality during the Holocaust. In approaching these testimonies from an oppositional stance, in attempting to 'read between the lines' of these memoirs and challenge traditional historical readings, we are able to unearth the complexities and subtleties of the texts that may otherwise remain unnoticed.

The next chapter also focuses on women's Holocaust testimonies as read from an oppositional, 'against the grain' stance, using a feminist ecocritical approach and literary analysis to uncover how a recurring pattern of ecological imagery is mobilised in women's accounts to frame the authors as resistant, resilient victims. The roles played by non-human actors – lice, insects, rats, the natural landscape and the weather – in the retrospective narrativization of experiences of incarceration, I argue, are crucial to understanding how many women survivors yoke personal, post-atrocity identity, preconceived notions of gender, and ecological relationships in their post-Holocaust imaginations. Above all, the following chapter examines how women survivors use representations of their ecological relationships as actants which allow them to emphasise and maintain an acceptable, and often gender conforming, self-image. More than that, and paying particular attention to contextuality and specificity, it interrogates why many

women feel compelled, using ecological relationships as an overarching explanatory trope to construct their post-Holocaust identities, to interweave the construction of post-Holocaust narrative with the construction of post-Holocaust identity.

4

Writing as Resistance: Analysing Representations of Nature[1]

> We never saw any animals in the camps. I was in the Płaszów, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen camps and never saw a cat or a dog, not even a bird in the sky. The smoke from the ovens must have driven the creatures away.
>
> Bertha Ferderber-Salz, *And the Sun Kept Shining…*[2]

During the Holocaust outbreaks of disease and parasite infestations shaped the lives of Auschwitz I, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Ravensbrück prisoners, as well as those confined in prison and isolation cells and numerous other internment centres in Nazi-occupied Europe. For many women survivors who went on to publish their retrospective, written accounts of the Holocaust after the event, their time in these institutions is characterised, at least in its retelling, not only by the fear and reality of losing loved ones, cruelty and torture, starvation, and death, but by turbulent relationships with the natural world. A recurring pattern of ecological imagery, a central preoccupation with the non-human actors of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, I argue, is mobilised in many women's testimonies to define the authors as resistant, resilient survivors. More than that, the ecological frameworks with which some narrativize their experiences of resistance and survival in the camps illustrate a reliance upon conformism to conventional gender expectations in the process of retelling that is worth interrogating. As such, I will contend that the roles played by non-human actors – lice, fleas, insects, rats, and the weather and natural

[1] Parts of this chapter were published in November 2020 in the *Women's History Review*. Roseanna Ramsden, "Waging War Against the Parasites': Critiquing Women's Narrative Identities Through Feminist Ecocritical Reflections on Women and the Holocaust', *Women's History Review* (November, 2020), DOI: 10.1080/09612025.2020.1828287.

[2] Bertha Ferderber-Salz, *And the Sun Kept Shining…* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1980), p. 129.

landscape – in the written accounts of these women survivors are crucial to understanding how the authors yoke personal, post-atrocity identity, preconceived notions of gender, and ecological relationships in their post-Holocaust imaginations.

In this unconventional approach, literary analysis informed by feminist ecocriticism is applied, with the aim of offering a more nuanced, 'emancipatory alternative', to use the words of Douglas Vakoch, to cultural ecofeminism that can be applied in the reading of Holocaust testimonies.[3] Cultural ecofeminism, established in the 1970s, posits that, to cite Karen Warren, 'there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women […] and the unjustified domination of nature.'[4] This school of thought proposes that there exists an inherent connection between women and the natural world, and works to elevate what cultural ecofeminists believe to be 'women's virtues – caring, nurturing, interdependence – and reject the individualist, rationalist, and destructive values typically associated with men.'[5] Ynestra King, in particular, presupposes a 'woman-nature connection' that, she claims, feminist scholars should '*consciously choose* not to sever […] by joining male culture.'[6] This chapter avoids such reductive dichotomies and dualistic, essentialist thinking, and refutes King's stance, seeking instead to analyse a diverse range of women's memoirs of imprisonment during the Holocaust to establish how the authors frame their turbulent relationships with the natural world retrospectively as an antidote to their oppression. What emerges from the narratives of experience here examined, I argue, is a heterogenous range of responses

[3] Douglas A. Vakoch, ed., *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, and Literature* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 6.
[4] Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 1.
[5] Lori Gruen, 'Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection Between Women and Animals', in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed. by Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1993), pp. 60 – 90 (p. 77).
[6] Ynestra King, 'The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology,' in *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. by Judith Plant (London: Green Print, 1989), pp. 19 – 28 (p. 23).

used, in the very act of retelling, to understand and ultimately defy Nazism's oppressive and dehumanising forces in the long term.

Survivor memoirs, however, cannot be divorced from the intellectual and popular landscapes they inhabit. As such, this chapter considers issues of contextuality, questioning how changing attitudes in Holocaust historiography and Holocaust remembrance, the existence (or lack thereof) of testimonial discursive frameworks, and the personal factors of each author (religion, time and position of incarceration, place of imprisonment, etc.) may have impacted how these women organise and narrativize their experiences. For while women have consistently written about the natural world and non-human actors in their memoirs, the *ways* they have written about them have altered over time and space. As will be seen, the women's memoirs here studied published in the immediate post-war years tend, when depicting their authors' ecological experiences, to favour gruesome imagery and to centre individual (rather than group) efforts to reclaim autonomy. Those writing later, and particularly in the 1990s, have a tendency to frame the same practices as a means of caretaking and nurturance. Others still, and particularly those writing in and after the 1970s, represent their interactions with lice, insects and rats, and even the natural landscape, in a manner that underscores the exaggerated importance of domestic, and traditionally feminine, pursuits and interests, among them washing, self-presentation, mothering, and the home.

These patterns are attributable, I posit, to numerous factors. In the first instance, and as shown in Chapter 1, the literary canon of women's survivor literature had, between the 1970s and the late 1990s, become concerned with the portrayal of strong women's bonds and mutual assistance. This too was reflected in critical literature of the 1990s, keen to emphasise women's fulfilment, and reliance upon, normative women's roles. This was, to refer once again to Chapter 1, likely a result of the birth of women's and gender

studies as scholarly fields, the second wave feminist movement, and the development of the 'ideal victim narrative.'[7] Yet in the immediate post-war years until the late 1960s, neither historiography nor women in their narratives paid particular attention to these facets of women's experience. Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and with no testimonial framework to guide their manner of retelling, these women's testimonies, it seems, were unmediated by many of the external factors that would shape the accounts of those writing later. More than that, and as will later be discussed, the personal factors of the authors shape their retelling of ecological Holocaust experiences. Christian resistance workers, for example, were afforded greater privilege than their Jewish counterparts, often worrying less about starvation, illness and death. It is thus unsurprising that their reflections on their ecological relationships are distinctive from those of many Jewish women whose experiences were markedly different.

Moreover, given this chapter's focus on survivor representation of resistance as associated with the ecological, it is important to situate the understanding of resistance here used within the scholarly discourse on it. The definition of resistance as enacted by victims of the Holocaust, and particularly its Jewish victims, has long been the subject of debate within Holocaust studies. In his monograph, *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective*, Dan Michman offers a useful timeline of historiography on the term resistance in Holocaust scholarship, and its evolution since the end of the Second World War:

> The aggrandizement of European resistance in the 1940s and 1950s aroused […] a sense of disquiet among the Jews[…]. The perception of Jewish passivity – 'going like lambs to the slaughter' – caused Jewish scholars and others to take an apologetic stance. This was expressed […] by a more in-depth examination of Jewish life under the Nazi regime. As a result of the latter, the semantic field of the term 'resistance' began to expand, and a new concept, *kiddush ha-hayyim*, or 'sanctification of life', was introduced. By the end

[7] Bouris, *Complex Political Victims*, p. 72.

> of the 1960s the Hebrew term *Amidah* ('steadfastness') […] began to take a strong hold in the literature on the Holocaust.[8]

The definition here used will understand the resistance depicted by these women survivors as *amidah*, particularly as it is described by historian Marc Dworzecki:

> The concept of 'stand' is comprehensive, embracing all expressions of Jewish non-conformism and all forms of resistance and all acts by Jews aimed at thwarting the evil design of the Nazis – a design to destroy the Jews, to deprive them of their humanity and to reduce them to dregs before snuffing out their lives.[9]

Thus, the discussions of resistance in this chapter refer not to armed resistance, but to acts of defiance and opposition, to the rejection of Nazi oppression, the maintenance of humanity, and the preservation of the will to survive, as represented in women's narratives. This form of resistance, I argue, is a recurring trope in these women's testimonies of Nazi internment centres, and is often written about through an ecological lens. As such, and within this understanding, this chapter's examination of depictions of resistance does not aim to glorify resistance (or depictions of it) while overlooking – or unfairly judging – those who do not claim to have resisted their oppression in any way. It also does not seek, in Joan Ringelheim's words, to render all Jews 'heroes or martyrs and all women heroines.'[10]

Instead, it aims to determine how women frame their own practices in concentration camps, forced labour camps and prison cells as humanity and identity-retaining acts of resistance through the implementation of an ecological narrative framework. It seeks to examine the gendered construction of these women's narratives,

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[8] Dan Michman, *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), pp. 217 – 18.
[9] Meir (Marc) Dworzecki, 'The Day to Day Stand of the Jews', in *The Catastrophe of European Jewry: Antecedents, History, Reflections: Selected Papers*, ed. by Israel Gutman and Livia Rothkirchen (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1976), p. 367.
[10] Ringelheim, 'Women and the Holocaust', p. 390.

and to question how preconceived notions of gender dictate the manner in which women authors relate resistance and survival to typically feminine, ritualised behaviours such as washing and cleaning, particularly as associated with the natural world. Most significantly, this chapter scrutinises how women use representations of their ecological relationships in Nazi institutions as actants which work to emphasise their own humanity, identity, adaptability, morality and resilience, their own acts of *amidah*, and why they feel compelled to present their experiences of incarceration through the lens of heroism at all. It seeks to interrogate how women use ecological relationships as an overarching explanatory trope in their memoirs for constructing their own post-Holocaust identities and processing and retelling their experiences. Above all, this chapter offers an oppositional and eco-centric approach to rereading women's published Holocaust memoirs, in order, in Ellen Stroud's words, to ask how a close examination of representations of 'biology, […] ecology, […] birds and fish and trees and rats and roaches and even human bodies' can offer 'both new questions and new answers about our past.'[11]

I. Historiography

The manner in which ecological imagery has featured in women's (and indeed, men's) memoirs is largely overlooked by historians focused on anthropic and socio-political factors of the Holocaust. Didier Pollefeyt attributes the dominating anthropocentrism of mainstream Holocaust research to the fact that it 'was a human catastrophe, an evil committed against humanity, not against nature.'[12] Scholars have been understandably

[11] Ellen Stroud, 'On Ecofeminist Philosophy', *Ethics and the Environment*, 7:2 (September 2002), 1 – 11 (p. 1).
[12] Pollefeyt, *Holocaust and Nature* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), p. 10.

reluctant to stray far from the human aspects – namely perpetrator mentality and survivor narrative – of the event, because to do so could risk appearing callous or ignorant to the suffering of the Holocaust's victims. In a small number of recent studies, however, the general scholarly disinclination to address these topics has been challenged.

Academic focus is increasingly being given to Holocaust landscapes. This most often comes in the form of historical and geographical study focused on sites of Nazi geographical and spatial policy. Grounded in environmental and landscape history, this scholarship approaches the Holocaust from environment-orientated perspectives.[13] Outwith this research, both historical and literary studies carried out under the influence of ecocritical theory, and that specifically examine survivor representations of wildlife, are rare, as are those explicitly dedicated to examining how ecological relationships function in the narratives of survivors. However, Didier Pollefeyt's 2013 edited collection, *Holocaust and Nature*, forms part of the nascent historiography approaching the Holocaust using an environmental framework. One of the only studies of its kind, it stresses the importance of using survivor testimony to gain valuable insights into the relationship between Holocaust victims and their natural surroundings during the event. Similarly, Suzanne Weiner Weber's 2015 article on the forest as a liminal space during the Holocaust, based on interviews conducted by the author, provides a novel approach to forests as places of ambivalence where, in her words, 'pre-war norms and cultural

[13] See Janet Jacobs, *Memorializing the Holocaust: Gender, Genocide and Collective Memory* (London: IB Taurus, 2010); Dan Stone, 'Holocaust Spaces', in *Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich*, ed. by Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 45 - 62; Michael Fleming, 'Spaces of Engagement and the Geographies of Obligation: Responses to the Holocaust', in *Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich*, ed. by Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 282 – 298; David Patterson, 'The Ashen Earth: Jewish Reflections on Our Relation to Nature in the Post-Holocaust Era', in *Holocaust and Nature*, ed. by Didier Pollefeyt (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), pp. 97 – 104; Rochelle L. Millen, 'Land, Nature, and Judaism: Post-Holocaust Reflections', in *Holocaust and Nature*, ed. by Didier Pollefeyt (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), pp. 73 - 87; James A. Tyner, *Genocide and the Geographical Imagination: Life and Death in Germany, China, and Cambodia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012); Anne Kelly Knowles, Tim Cole and Alberto Giordano, eds., *Geographies of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

boundaries were challenged, reversed and reworked.'[14] Tim Cole's 2014 article, '"Nature Was Helping Us": Forests, Trees, and Environmental Histories of the Holocaust,' saw environmental histories of the Holocaust introduced into Holocaust studies for the first time, and his 2016 monograph, *Holocaust Landscapes*, offers a thoughtful exploration of how nature functions in survivor post-Holocaust accounts of the event, dealing with Holocaust landscapes such as ghettos, forests, trains, rivers and roads, among other locations to create an account of both the places and stories of the event. More recently, Nikolaus Wachsmann's work on a sensory history of Auschwitz and *The Environmental History of the Holocaust*, a 2019 special issue of the *Journal of Genocide Research*, offer nuanced insights into the Holocaust as an ecological event.[15] Though these approaches focus largely on the impact of the Holocaust on the natural environment as opposed to retrospective survivor responses to the zoological and ecological elements of their experiences, they are of central importance to this chapter, and have informed the approach here taken. In particular, this chapter has been inspired by the work of Tim Cole.

Yet although much of this scholarship shines a light on the ecological and environmental aspects of survivor experience and testimony, gender is rarely used as a category of analysis with which to complicate its findings. Though in his monograph Tim Cole dedicates considerable space to Auschwitz-Birkenau as a 'segregated, gendered space,' one within which male and female prisoners lived in 'entirely separate – yet parallel – worlds,' he does not interrogate how gender may have informed survivor retellings of Auschwitz as an ecological experience, nor what a feminist ecocritical

[14] Weiner Weber, 'The Forest as a Liminal Space: A Transformation of Culture and Norms during the Holocaust', *Holocaust Studies*, 14:1 (Februart, 2015), 35 - 60 (p. 35).
[15] See Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Being in Auschwitz: Lived Experience and the Holocaust* (January, 2020) https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/being-in-auschwitz-nikolaus-wachsmann/ [accessed 17/09/2020]; Jacek Malczynski, Ewa Domanska et al., 'The Environmental History of the Holocaust', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 22 (January, 2020).

examination of Holocaust ecologies can reveal.[16] Sarah Pinnock's chapter in Pollefeyt's edited collection, 'Vulnerable Bodies: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust and Nature,' examines the writings of philosopher Simone Weil and Jewish theologian Melissa Raphael, and is one of few studies seeking to explicitly approach Holocaust ecologies through critical gender and feminist studies lenses. 'Guided by feminist interests and informed by women's perspectives,' Pinnock explains, her chapter writes against cultural feminism guilty of essentialising women and categorising them as inherently bound to the natural world, instead proposing 'alternative ways of thinking about the Holocaust and nature' centred upon 'feminist concerns about subordination and hierarchy, and ideals of reciprocity and mutuality.'[17]

Pinnock's study is motivated by the desire, 'not to create gender dichotomies,' as she is careful to point out, but 'to include more women's voices in dialogue,' and ultimately to garner 'critical purchase on faulty dualisms.'[18] Despite her laudable goals and the implementation of non-traditional methodologies, however, Pinnock promises more in her chapter's introduction than she ultimately delivers. The limited scope of her chapter, its preoccupation with the relatively well-known works of Weil and Raphael, sees her neglect to amplify, bring into dialogue, or examine the voices of women who experienced and survived the Holocaust. Yet survivor voices should be central to any victim-centred, gender-led scholarship on the Holocaust, and particularly those of women. Such a focus allows for gender and gendered experiences and narratives to be written into mainstream Holocaust history, to be brought out of its footnotes.[19]

[16] Tim Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 80 – 81.
[17] Sarah K. Pinnock, 'Vulnerable Bodies: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust and Nature', in *Holocaust and Nature*, ed. by Didier Pollefeyt (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), p. 138.
[18] Ibid., p. 139, p. 138.
[19] Here I paraphrase Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust*, p. 147; Ibid., p. 151.

This chapter seeks, in building on Pinnock's work and by examining women survivors' perspectives, to challenge the seeming irrelevance of the ecological elements of survivor literature to Holocaust scholarship. In doing so, it aims to illustrate that a focus on these facets of survivor response is not to overlook the human, but to complicate our understanding of it, and ultimately, to insist that this approach allows a fuller picture of survivor responses to emerge. After all, a survey of women's published Holocaust memoirs reveals a compulsion among them to write about the natural world that, in its unpicking, serves to further our understanding of the Holocaust as a whole. Certainly, it is interesting to note the sheer array of women's testimonies whose titles reference the elemental and the ecological, and the important role that this suggests nature played in both experience and its retelling for women. While Bertha Ferderber-Salz's testimony is entitled *And the Sun Kept Shining…*, and Giuliana Tedeschi's memoir is named *There is a Place on Earth*, Janina David's short published testimonies are entitled *A Square of Sky* and *A Touch of Earth*. Likewise, Janina Bauman's memoir of hiding is named *Winter in the Morning*. These titles highlight that the narrative of experience, at least for these women survivors, is formulated using an ecological framework.

II. Parasites and Insect Infestations

Illnesses through contact with vermin in Auschwitz I and II are widely documented in Holocaust histories and survivor memoirs alike as just one of the natural dangers that prisoners of the camp complex faced. This danger was natural in the sense that, though the threat of disease and illness was created by a deliberately manufactured set of conditions, they are not man-made but naturally occurring. A survey of literature on the conditions in Auschwitz I and Auschwitz-Birkenau reveals the extent of the

epidemiological threat posed to internees. Israel Gutman and Michael Birenbaum note in their collection, *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, that in Auschwitz-Birkenau 'nature competed with man to create mass death.'[20] They explain that a typhus epidemic spread by lice and caused by overcrowding and primitive sanitary conditions killed thousands of prisoners in Birkenau, reaching its peak between summer 1942 and 1944. 'From May to December 1940, an estimated 220 died each month,' they write. 'From January to July 1941, this number tripled. From August to December 1941, it reached 1,000; by July 1942, it had passed 4,000.'[21] This epidemic continued, despite the quarantine and (minimal, and perhaps even bogus) delousing efforts of the SS and an increase in gas chamber selections, at an unstoppable rate until 1944. Specifically of the women's compound of Auschwitz I, Nikolaus Wachsmann notes in his history of the concentration camp, that from spring 1942 it was 'a sanitary disaster' in which illnesses such as typhus and typhoid fever were on the rise.[22] He attributes this to overcrowding caused by a large influx of women prisoners deported to Auschwitz in that year.

These conditions, however, were not limited to Auschwitz. In late autumn 1944, as Auschwitz and its killing centres were beginning to shut down as the Red Army advanced, many Jewish prisoners were sent to Ravensbrück. At this point, poor sanitary conditions catalysed by the arrival of thousands of Jewish women, claims Sarah Helm, meant that 'typhus broke out on a scale not seen […] before' in Ravensbrück.[23] Similarly, and particularly in the first months of 1945 when overcrowding at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp reached its pinnacle, illnesses such as typhus and typhoid fever, spread by vermin and caused by unhygienic conditions and overcrowding, led to the

[20] Israel Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 214.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, (New York: Abacus, 2016), p. 299.
[23] Helm, *If This is a Woman*, p. 462.

deaths of more than 35,000 people.[24] Joanne Reilly feels it important to note that it was 'the smaller of the women's compounds' in Bergen-Belsen that 'contained the majority of the typhus cases, had no bunks and little bedding.'[25]

i. The Destruction of Parasites

Unsurprisingly then, women write about epidemiological threat, contagion, and the torment of parasite infestations emphatically and frequently in their memoirs of these camps, paying particular attention to representing their own responses to lice. By contrast many male survivors write sparingly about lice, fleas and bed bugs. In his memoir, for example, Elie Wiesel neglects to depict lice in Birkenau or Monowitz at all. Likewise, Sam Pivnik makes only one brief reference to lice in his memoir, noting that 'they carried typhus and typhus was often deadly.'[26] Olga Lengyel, however, dedicates great space to this topic in her 1947 memoir, likely owing to her medical background. Some weeks into her incarceration in 1944, owing to her experience in the medical profession, Lengyel was drafted to work as a nurse in one of Birkenau's newly established women's infirmaries in Barrack 15. She also spent time in 1944 working in the hospital block in camp E. From this relatively privileged position Lengyel was well placed to witness the extent of the threat posed by lice and their effect on prisoners. She writes:

> We also had contagious cases of diphtheria, scarlet fever, and typhus, which was propagated by the myriad lice with which the camp abounded.
>
> A merciless war was waged between the lice and the internees, with the parasites generally the victors. The ludicrous disinfections could not discourage our adversaries, and we had neither the time nor the strength to struggle against a foe that multiplied at so bewildering a rate. We were all infested: those who worked in the kommandos, those who remained in the barracks, and those who were in the hospital. The lice were

[24] Joanne Reilly, *Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 17
[25] Ibid., p. 26.
[26] Pivnik, *Survivor*, p. 123.

> everywhere: in the clothing, in the koias, in the hair, in the beards, even in the eyebrows. They even crept under the bandages of the sick, covering the skin. I often told myself that if we remained in the camp much longer, we would all be dead, leaving only the rats and the lice.[27]

In this rendering, Lengyel illustrates the enormity of the louse infestation and the seeming immortality of the insects by noting the ineffectuality of large-scale disinfection. Nevertheless, and though she is careful to document the prisoners' lack of energy, her description of this human versus non-human 'war' of 'adversaries' foregrounds the women's tenacity in fighting against lice, as best they could, as equals. Indeed, despite Lengyel's claim that the women had 'neither the time nor the strength to struggle', her deployment of the language of war is suggestive of a resistant, fighting spirit among the women that matched the persistence of the lice.

In her memoir, Charlotte Delbo assimilates, even more explicitly than Lengyel, the prisoners' instinct for survival and their efforts to destroy the lice. She tells the story of women political prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau in the springtime (likely of 1943, though she does not specify) whose:

> fingers bending and contracting as they foraged through the rags, searched the armpits for lice which they squashed between the nails of their two thumbs. Blood made a brownish stain upon the nails that squeezed the lice.
>
> What was left of life in the eyes and the hands existed still in this gesture […].[28]

Delbo's portrayal is striking. Here the warfare induced by the assault of the vermin takes on a violent character, the women's hands stained with the blood of their foes. The women's drive for mastery over their own survival, their clutches at life, is told by Delbo through the lens of hostile ecological relationships.

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[27] Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, p. 135.
[28] Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, p. 109.

Ruth Elias's testimony was initially published in German in 1988. Unlike her counterparts, who were housed in women-only barracks, Elias was housed in family camp BIIb of Birkenau in the first weeks of her imprisonment in 1943. Though men and women were forbidden to enter one another's barracks, this was the only camp in Birkenau which housed both sexes, and in which they shared a communal washroom. She claims that, despite the frequent presence of men in the washroom, the women, with their 'feelings of modesty already dulled,' would dutifully wash themselves and kill lice to avoid infestations.[29] She writes:

> Our hunt for fleas, bedbugs and lice was endless. They reproduced so quickly that not even our well-devised measures to annihilate them could keep up with their proliferation. […] To wash ourselves we had to get up while it was still dark outside, because that was the only time water dripped from the faucets. […] [W]e felt no shame in taking off our clothes to wash ourselves. Cleanliness meant good health, and that meant avoiding the infirmary. […] There was no way to wash our things […] All we could do was shake our dresses thoroughly and hope that many of the lice would drop off. […] It was part of our daily routine to search the seams for the lice and kill them. But by the next day a new generation of the vermin had triumphantly moved back in.[30]

In this retelling, the violent elimination of lice works not only to emphasise the women's determination to reclaim lost agency and to structure their days, but ultimately to remain alive by avoiding the infirmary which meant 'almost certain death.'[31] Moreover, in a manner akin to Delbo and Lengyel, Elias uses the language of battle not only to highlight the persistence of the lice, but the resilience of the women on whom they fed.

Later, describing life in the Taucha labour camp to which she was transferred in October 1944, Elias shows this tenaciousness, learned, she suggests, in Auschwitz, to have been an enduring quality upon which she relied for survival. In Taucha, she claims, herself and other women working on coal duty would steal pieces of coal to heat the stove

[29] Elias, *Triumph of Hope*, p. 121.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., p. 120.

in their cold barrack. This meant that 'once the iron stovepipe was hot enough, we could "iron" the seams of our prison clothes to kill the lice that were hiding inside them.'[32] Central to Elias's retelling of this experience is her determination to concurrently battle the lice and to keep up good hygiene in order to survive. More than that, Elias's fusion of the typically feminine custom of ironing, of keeping clothes and body clean, with the killing of lice, is particularly striking. In conflating the two in her narrative, Elias blurs the boundaries between domestic tradition and camp existence to emphasise her ability to foster a sense of normalcy in these dire circumstances. In doing so, she draws attention to the gendered construction of her account, and to a narrative that implies that the women who maintained an essentialised and idealised sense of femininity through partaking in cleanliness practices were more likely to survive than those who did not.

Seweryna Szmaglewska also writes of her sense of assault by the lice of Birkenau in her 1945 memoir, *Smoke Over Birkenau*. Szmaglewska's Jewishness, however, is not evident in her memoir. She frames herself as belonging with, and living in barracks among, other Polish Nazi-opponents, and writes of the Jewish women of the camp as separate from herself. She details her experience with lice in the camp infirmary in which she was housed, sick with typhus:

> Suddenly the itching on the chest becomes stinging and concentrated in one spot, and you swiftly open your shirt. A louse in a strange position! Head sunk deep into your body, it stands perpendicular. It must be seized instantly; these are fast runners. *Your* blood shines through its light skin. A small drop of blood gushes out as the louse perishes under the pressure of your nail.[33]

Szmaglewska's italicised insistence on the visibility of her own blood in the body of the louse, and the infiltration of its body into her own, underscores her sense of lost agency

[32] Ibid., p. 170.
[33] Szmaglewska, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, p. 53.

and identity, as human and non-human become almost indistinguishable. Yet importantly, her claim that the lice 'must' be seized and killed speaks to her implied resistance of such a process. She goes on to note that in the infirmary:

> [A]ll around you, especially on such a sunny day as this, you see gaunt arms lift items of clothing or a dirty blanket to the light above their heads. Delousing is the only occupation for those who are recuperating. It starts with the early dawn. […] The best way is to take off all clothes, wrap the blanket closely about you, and examine each garment in turn. Of course it is cold, since an icy wind blows through the opening under the roof […] But a person would be willing to throw off all covers and sit in the nude for many hours only to get rid of this plague of blood-sucking insects. Hunger and cold are nothing as compared to lice.
>
> It is the same thing every day. […] How rapidly they multiply! […] It takes a lot of patience to destroy them all. […] The thumbs, especially the nails, are already bloodstained and covered with dried scales […] But alas, the lice do not rest. […] If you want to ensure at least a few hours of sleep that night, you must start it all over again. The hopelessness of this task brings discouragement and disgust, intensified by your aching back and horribly strained eyes. Sleep […] is the only alleviation […]. But even in sleep the hands wander nervously, provoked by the sting of the bites.[34]

Much like those of her counterparts, Szmaglewska's portrayal of the lice infestation of the infirmary block centres more on the women's delousing efforts than on the insects themselves. Though she notes the women's discouragement, it is their perseverance, the determination with which they attend to their endless task, and the blood – a lasting symbol of power and bodily agency momentarily regained – which stains their hands, that dominate this image. In Szmaglewska's retelling, even in sleep the women remain unwaveringly resistant to the attack of lice and dedicated to their pursuit of survival.

It is not only when writing of Auschwitz that these tropes emerge in women's memoirs. Though she was imprisoned in Auschwitz-Birkenau and later Ravensbrück, Sara Nomberg-Przytyk writes most emphatically about her experiences with lice in German forced labour camp, Rostock, from which she was liberated in May 1945. In her memoir in a chapter felicitously entitled 'The Plagues of Egypt,' Nomberg-Przytyk

[34] Ibid., pp. 53 – 55.

claims that only in Rostock, in which 72 women were crowded into one room, did she come 'to understand why one of the plagues that God sent on the Egyptians was lice.'[35] She recalls:

> This was a plague in whose presence we were helpless. […] They feasted on us day and night. This was an enemy whom you had to fight – search and destroy. When I went to the bathroom at night I would see women standing near the electric lamp that gave off a faint light, searching for lice in their clothes. […] "Don't be embarrassed," an elderly lady whispered in my ear, "otherwise the lice will eat you up." […] "the way they ate this girl in the first bed."
>
> The next day I looked at the young woman. She lay in bed motionless, semiconscious, covered with scabs. […] This young woman just lay there with the lice crawling all over her. They were devouring her alive. […] She died.[36]

Here, Nomberg-Przytyk's image of the women of her barrack in Rostock, relentless in their empowered effort to 'search and destroy' the lice, despite the enormity of the task, drives home Lengyel's assertion that many women prisoners maintained a fighting spirit. While the juxtaposition in this passage of helplessness and unwavering determination to kill the lice is jarring, it allows the author to underscore the resilience of herself and her companions. More than that, in her description of the sick woman Nomberg-Przytyk implies that those who lacked the strength or the will to wage war against the lice did not survive.

What emerges from these passages then, is a persistent, rhetorical emphasis on hostile ecological relationships used to structure resistant survivor identities. In the retelling of experience, this emphasis allows the writers to reassert rightful biopolitical order in which the human outranks the non-human, and to construct acceptable narratives of survival. Such a focus is made all the more significant when we consider the importance of the louse to Nazi ideology and imagery. Nazism's anti-Jewish diatribes

[35] Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz: True Tales*, p. 143.
[36] Ibid.

often used the imagery of lice and bacterial threat to characterise the Jews, who were represented as parasitic and unsanitary.[37] Nazism also disseminated the message, through antisemitic propaganda campaigns, that Jews required ghettoization because they allegedly carried contagious diseases and lice, and therefore posed a threat to Gentile society.[38] Thus, in the depiction of women reclaiming their own bodies by destroying lice, and even more pointedly, in the co-opting of Nazism's anti-Jewish language – Elias writes of 'measures to annihilate' the lice, the 'hunt' and 'search' for fleas, and 'a new generation of the vermin' – the women dismiss the identifiers placed on them by Nazi propaganda, and recover their sense of humanity. Furthermore, these reflections call attention to the authors' utilisation of hostile ecological imagery as an emancipatory tool; one through which they are able not to reassert, as ecofeminist tenets might suggest, an innate connection with the natural world, but their individual and collective identities as women.

Moreover, the publication dates of these memoirs are revealing. The earliest among these accounts to be published – those of Szmaglewska and Lengyel – emerged in the 1940s, almost immediately after the war had ended. At this point, Holocaust historiography was largely dominated by historical studies of perpetrators; little scholarship on survivor memoirs – which may have shaped the way survivors narrativized their experiences – had been produced. Survivors writing their memoirs in this decade were also the first to do so. As such, and as abovementioned, a normative standard of women's (and men's) Holocaust testimonies, a testimonial yardstick, if you will, by which survivors could gauge the acceptability of the content of their accounts, was yet to

[37] David Cesarani and Sarah Kavanaugh, eds., *Critical Concepts in Historical Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 43.
[38] Agata Katarzyna Dabrowska, 'The Campaign "Jews-Lice-Typhus" as an Example of Polish Participation in Nazi Anti-Semitic Propaganda', in *Eradicating Differences: The Treatment of Minorities in Nazi-Dominated Europe*, ed. by Anton Weiss Wendt (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 187 – 201 (p. 187).

be established. Thus, it is unsurprising that these authors write with remarkable frankness of the goriness of delousing. Though the memoirs of Delbo, Nomberg-Przytyk and Elias were published later, in the 1960s/1970s and 1980s respectively, it is important to note that they were produced before the notion of women as carers during the Holocaust truly became central to feminist Holocaust scholarship. This trend in historiography became prevalent in the 1990s, as large-scale studies – among them Gurewitsch's *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters* and Goldeberg's 1996 article 'Lessons Learned from Gentle Heroism'– began to perpetuate gendered assumptions about women's behaviours. This may go some way to explaining why these memoirs, unlike many of their later counterparts, centre hostile ecological relationships rather than those that assert the nurturance, or traditional femininity, of the authors.

ii. Washing Away Lice

Many Jewish women also depict hygienic ritual and cleanliness practices as tactics used to keep lice and other parasites at bay. The notion of cleanliness, and the preservation of femininity through its upkeep, is undoubtedly a post-war popular and scholarly construction that pairs with the post-Holocaust notion of women behaving as caregivers and nurturers. This stereotype – that women traditionally value cleanliness and self-presentation – may explain the frequency of its representation in their testimonies. In many women's accounts, to wash in order to avoid lice infestations, and ultimately illness and death, is, at least in the retelling of experience, to preserve hope, retain gender identity and humanity, and ultimately to rebel against an oppressive force that sought to destroy prisoners' will to live.

Halina Birenbaum felt it important to include washing in her testimony. During the particularly harsh winter of 1943-1944, Birenbaum remembers, she worked in the *Aussenkommando* (outside Auschwitz grounds) in an underwear workshop. Over half of the women with whom she worked, she claims, had spotted typhus, which was 'raging in the camp' at that time.[39] While she was lucky enough to evade the epidemic for considerable time, in her memoir, originally published in 1967 in Polish, she claims that her central concern was not for her health and safety, but with never forgetting 'her own dignity.'[40] She writes:

> I was more concerned at this time with getting rid of the harassing itch, dirt and lice than with obtaining additional rations of soup. Sometimes, when I stayed in the barracks after a night shift or thanks to the favor of a room orderly, I would creep into the washroom – its entrances were usually guarded by a special sentry or a *kapo* with a heavy stick – in order to wash myself in icy water, to bathe my continually scratched bites and sores. Frozen with cold, I hastily pulled on my lice-infested rags […]. These risky bathings soothed the itching for a few hours; unfortunately I had few opportunities to take advantage of them. In the evenings after roll call […] there was such a crowd in the washroom […] there was no question of reaching the taps.[41]

In this rendering, Birenbaum's focus lies not on the threat that the lice posed to her well-being, particularly as she worked in a highly infected work group, but on her responsive drive to keep clean. More important to her survival than obtaining her food ration, and worth the potential beating she may have had to endure, she claims, was bathing to allay dirt, itchiness and lice. Washing takes precedent in this passage, and ultimately her, she implies, to preserve courage and a sense of normalcy.

Sara Zyskind echoes Birenbaum's sentiments. In Mittelstein slave labour camp, to which she was transferred from Auschwitz-Birkenau, Zyskind worked 12-hour shifts at a factory beyond the camp grounds. In her 1981 memoir, Zyskind writes that in her work group in Mittelstein:

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[39] Birenbaum, *Hope is the Last*, p. 122.
[40] Ibid., p. 108.
[41] Ibid, pp. 123 – 124.

> There were women among us who, the moment they put on their coats and socks, never removed them again. They went to sleep fully dressed, not bothering even to take off their boots. […] [T]hey would throw themselves onto their bunks, mud-caked boots and all, as soon as they came in. Many of the women who neglected themselves in this way became infested with lice, but most of us tried to keep ourselves clean. We would take off coat, socks, and shoes before going to sleep no matter how tired we were, and even during the coldest weather, we would wash ourselves with the hot coffee we received on returning from work.[42]

Though in her retelling Zyskind describes some women who avoided washing between factory shifts, who lacked the energy to attempt to fight lice and preserve dignity by keeping up a level of personal hygiene, she clearly implies that these women were the exception and not the rule. The description of these women works comparatively in Zyskind's memoir, drawing attention to her own strength of character in the face of extreme cold and unbearable fatigue. Moreover, Zyskind simultaneously emphasises her own success in living up to an ideal of womanhood. Those who refused or were unable to keep clean, she suggests, failed in some way, and ultimately succumbed to their oppression, while those, such as Zyskind, who, according to her own narrativization, ritualistically maintained good personal hygiene, resisted it. In this sense, Zyskind frames keeping clean to avoid lice infestation as a survival strategy that depended on asserting traditional female identity. Seweryna Szmaglewska writes in a comparable manner. She recalls that in late spring of 1943 in Auschwitz-Birkenau, after many of the camp's SS fell ill with typhus, a renewed, organised drive to delouse prisoners ensued. Some internees, she explains, also increased their personal efforts at delousing through the washing of clothes and body:

> At this time you could really keep clean if you were very anxious to do so, if you were willing to take some time from your sleep to wash in the gas chamber by night. Thus, there were already among us some clean women, who washed their underwear and had

[42] Zyskind, *Stolen Years*, p. 191.

> no lice. They knew how to avoid dirt and keep clean, which was still considered a luxury in the camp.[43]

Keeping clean to ward off lice, much like mercilessly destroying them, is written about by Szmaglewska as a form of resistance that required considerable sacrifice and determination. This is one of the most persistent patterns of imagery to recur in women's testimonies. This pattern is all the more revealing when we study comparatively the memoirs of male survivors of the Auschwitz camp complex, many of whom dedicate little space to the maintenance of good hygiene as a response to parasites. In his testimony, *If this is a Man*, for example, Primo Levi rarely discusses lice and insects while describing his experiences of Auschwitz-Monowitz, to which he was deported in 1944. His reflections on cleanliness as protection against lice infestations are markedly different, as can be seen in his description of the wash room on his initiation into the camp:

> On the opposite wall an enormous white, red and black louse encamps, with the writing […] *Nach dem Abort, vor dem Essen Hände waschen, nicht vergessen* (After the latrine, before eating, wash your hands, do not forget). […] In this place it is practically pointless to wash every day in the turbid water of the filthy washbasins for purposes of cleanliness and health; but it is most important as a symptom of remaining vitality, and necessary as an instrument of moral survival.
>
> I must confess it: after only one week of prison, the instinct for cleanliness disappeared in me. […] Why should I wash? […] Would I live a day, an hour longer? I would probably live a shorter time, because to wash is an effort, a waste of energy and warmth. […] The more I think about it, the more washing one's face in our condition seems a stupid feat, even frivolous […].[44]

Despite his recollection that Steinlauf told him, '[w]e must certainly wash our faces […] to remain alive, not to begin to die,' to ensure the upkeep of 'moral survival,' Levi claims in his retelling that he felt that washing served no real purpose.[45] Likewise, Paul Steinberg

[43] Szmaglewska, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, p. 158.
[44] Levi, *If This is a Man*, pp. 45 – 46.
[45] Ibid., p. 47.

writes practically of his experiences with parasites in the camp in his 1996 memoir, providing no descriptions of hygiene practices used to deter them. He explains: 'We've become experts in comparative entomology, with particular competence in the carnivorous species: fleas, lice, and bedbugs. Lice are the most dangerous because they carry typhus. […] The bedbugs are the most ferocious.'[46] For these male survivors, at least, perhaps because self-presentation and cleanliness are not traditionally masculine pursuits, an emphasis on washing as a lice deterrent is not a necessary component in the construction of self-image or the narrativization of experience.

Research on women and the Holocaust sheds some light on this disparity between male and female accounts. Many studies emphasise the significance – as it appears in women's written and oral testimonies of Nazi concentration and forced labour camps – of keeping clean, and stress the difference between male and female attitudes toward cleanliness. Nechama Tec, for instance, focuses on hygiene in her interviews with survivors in her monograph, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men and the Holocaust*. She notes that many of the women survivors interviewed place emphasis on the importance of cleanliness for 'prisoners' health, their self-esteem, and ultimately their adjustment to the surroundings.'[47] Tec concludes that keeping clean was significant for the women she interviewed because it aided survival and good health, and that 'the consistently greater inclination toward cleanliness of women may be explained in part by the traditionally high value women place on personal appearance.'[48] She is told by one interviewee that good hygiene in Salzwedel work camp, to which she was deported after internment in Auschwitz, meant:

[46] Steinberg, *Speak You Also*, pp. 71 – 72.
[47] Tec, *Resilience and Courage*, p. 155.
[48] Ibid., 157.

> That one is human. […] Before washing, a person felt like nothing, no hair, no dress, but when the bed was clean and the person was clean, and one had a little hair … […] It was so important to feel human.
> Before that, we were like wild people or something. But because we were a little cleaner here, we felt more like talking. […] We felt like human beings because we washed and tried to be clean. This way, we somehow acted against them and against what they wanted us to become.[49]

Tec is right to draw attention to the importance of hygiene and cleanliness to some women survivors in the retelling of experience, and particularly to highlight that its value was connected to health and self-esteem. More than that, in women's narrativizations of the Holocaust, the high value placed on cleanliness works as another form of the women as carers trope: to reinforce a self-image compliant with gender norms and traditionally feminine practices. Yet, Tec only briefly touches upon washing – as it is included in women's testimonies – as an act of retrospective resistance for women, despite one interviewee's claims that it functioned 'as an act against them and against what they wanted us to become.' More attention ought to be paid to how descriptions of washing function as humanity-retaining acts and reinforcements of gender identity, particularly given how commonly this form of resistance and empowerment is emphasised in women's memoirs of incarceration.

iii. A United Front against Parasites

The violent destruction of lice and the washing of clothes and bodies to keep lice, fleas and bedbugs at bay, are often framed in Jewish women's memoirs not only as ritualistic in nature, but as activities of empowerment over which the women prisoners, particularly of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, could unite. Kitty Hart-Moxon remembers that in camp

[49] Ibid.

BIIb of Birkenau a concerted effort to kill lice was often a group effort, each prisoner helping the next out. She recalls in her memoir:

> It was common to see a couple of girls sitting on their bunks delousing each other; years later, whenever I went to the zoo with my children and saw monkeys picking nits off each other, I was reminded of my friends in Auschwitz. [50]

It is striking here that Hart-Moxon uses a comparison to animalistic behaviour to underscore her implication that many women prisoners resisted the dehumanising conditions of Auschwitz-Birkenau, both through maintaining supportive friendships and lice removal. Her suggestion is that, paradoxically, there was something instinctual about the women's attempts to maintain dignity and humanity, and in their tendency to turn delousing into a social practice.

Rena Kornreich Gelissen and Sara Tuvel Bernstein similarly frame the destruction of lice in the respective camps about which they write, as a means by which women prisoners fostered genuine human connections with one another. This is all the more revealing when we consider that both accounts were published in the 1990s, not only after decades of women's memoirs – increasingly focused on women's relationship with one another – had been published, but after feminist Holocaust scholarship had begun to frame women's experiences as largely centred upon caretaking and nurturance. Kornreich Gelissen and her sister Danka were deported to Auschwitz I on the first transport of Jewish women to the camp in March 1942. In August 1942 the women's section of Auschwitz I was moved to Birkenau, and so the author and her sister were transferred. Kornreich Gelissen claims in her 1995 memoir that in Auschwitz I in Block Ten, delousing and washing were social events that took place on Sundays:

[50] Hart-Moxon, *Return to Auschwitz,* p. 90.

> We sit on our beds, speaking to one another for the first time. […] Meaningless chatter that has no place in memory. […] Bashfully we try to rid ourselves of the lice imbedded in our uniforms and every crevice of our bodies, scratching our heads, brushing out our underarms. I take off my pants and run my fingers along the seams and pockets, pulling the bloodsuckers off and squeezing them between my fingernails until they pop or squish with my blood.
>
> Within an hour my fingernails are black and blue from killing the parasites, so I toss them on the floor, squishing them with my shoes or just ignoring their squirming white bodies. […] I wash my face and hands three or four times, hoping to feel clean again. It is futile.[51]

In this retelling, the collective violence of delousing clothes functions as a lens through which the author demonstrates the first instances of friendliness and bonding among the women of her block. Coming together as a united front against the lice and, by extension, their oppressors, the women are shown to maintain human relationships and foster a sense of normalcy.

Sara Tuvel Bernstein, a Romanian Jewish woman deported to Ravensbrück in 1944, writes comparably of the manner in which, on lunch breaks from outside work, herself and her companions would delouse one another. She explains in her 1997 testimony:

> [d]uring our noon break the four of us […] picked off the lice one by one. […] I was picking them off [Lily's] neck – one! two! three! – and throwing them to the ground. Ellen teased, "For someone who didn't know what a louse was when we walked through the gate, you sure are doing a good job!"
>
> "But I learned, didn't I?" I laughed, and with the heel of my shoe, ground to a pulp all the lice crawling at my feet.[52]

Tuvel Bernstein's depiction of this activity functions as identity construction on multiple levels, underscoring her own sense of self as adaptable, caring, resilient and good-humoured. The juxtaposition of her dutiful nurturance of Lily and the mercilessness with

[51] Kornreich Gelissen, *Rena's Promise*, p. 80.
[52] Sara Tuvel Bernstein, with Louise Toots Thornton and Marlene Bernstein Samuels, *The Seamstress: A Memoir of Survival*, intro. by Edgar M. Bronfman (New York: Berkley Boks, 1999), pp. 239 – 240.

which she destroys the lice sees Tuvel Bernstein reinforce her strength of character while maintaining a narrative of gender conformity.

This too is evident in Olga Lengyel's memoir. She remembers that while working in the camp E hospital block of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944 she was relatively privileged, and struggled less with parasite infestations than many other inmates because she had access to a washbasin and her living quarters were not overcrowded. Nonetheless, in order to protect both hospital staff and patients, she claims: '[w]e had daily delousing sessions and never ceased to encourage the patients to do likewise.'[53] She goes on:

> No spectacle was more comforting than that provided by the women when they undertook to cleanse themselves thoroughly in the evening. They passed the single scrubbing brush to one another with a firm determination to resist the dirt and the lice. That was our only way of waging war against the parasites, against our jailers, and against every force that made us its victims.[54]

Here Lengyel explicitly frames the maintenance of good hygiene not only as a unifying activity, one through which the women bonded, but as a resistance and survival technique which concurrently defied the lice, the women's persecutors, and ultimately their victimisation. To use Lengyel's words, in this rendering washing illustrates a stand 'against every force that made us victims.' By including such stories in their narratives, these women are able to construct their identities as irrepressible survivors, and present women prisoners of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück as existing in unity *against* nature and, by extension, their oppressors, in order to remain alive. Through this lens, these survivors yoke the construction of post-Holocaust identity, hostile ecological relationships, and narratives of compliance to normative gender roles.

[53] Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, p. 135.
[54] Ibid.

iv. An Ethic of Partnership

Not all women's memoirs of concentration and forced labour camps, among other Nazi sites of incarceration, however, abound with representations of hostile ecological relationships. Some of the authors who experienced greater privilege than their Jewish counterparts – largely Christians and resistance members who worried less about starvation, disease, overcrowding and death during their incarcerations – choose to depict a strengthened bond with their human counterparts as well as their parasitic cohabitants, underscoring their accounts with a traditionally feminine ethic of partnership and caring. Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch Christian watchmaker who worked with the resistance movement in Amsterdam. In February 1944 her entire family were arrested and detained at Scheveningen Prison. Corrie and her sister Betsie were later transferred to Herzogenbusch concentration camp, and then to Ravensbrück. In her 1971 memoir, *The Hiding Place*, Ten Boom writes with unusual gratitude of her struggles with lice and fleas in Barracks 28 of Ravensbrück, to which she was transferred with her sister after time spent in Barracks 8 of the quarantine compound. She remembers that Betsie had begun to pray to God in thanks for the lice in their barrack. She explains:

> The fleas! This was too much. "Betsie, there's no way even God can make me grateful for a flea." "Give thanks in *all* circumstances," she quoted. […] And so we stood between piers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas. But this time I was sure Betsie was wrong.[55]

Later she claims that after some time, she and Betsie began to call meetings in which they would read the Bible (which they had smuggled in) to other prisoners of their block, who had been transferred from concentration camps in Belgium, Austria, Poland and France.

[55] Corrie Ten Boom, with John and Elizabeth Sherrill *The Hiding Place* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004), p. 185.

She explains that they were able to do this without fear of punishment because 'in the large dormitory room there was almost no supervision at all.'[56] Eventually, Ten Boom claims, Betsie discovered that the reason for the lack of supervision was the lice infestation in the barrack. A supervisor, Ten Boom remembers Betsie explaining, '"wouldn't step through the door and neither would the guards. And you know why" Betsie could not keep the triumph from her voice: "Because of the fleas!"'[57] Thus, and though Ten Boom's focus here is largely used to demonstrate her sister's faith and God's blessing, the author also emphasises an empowering connection with the lice – or fleas – which served to counter the women's subordination. In Ten Boom's narrative, the fleas work as an actant with which she is able to demonstrate bonding among the prisoner community and empowering, humanising connections.

Earlier in her memoir, Ten Boom describes the time she spent in solitary confinement in a prison cell at Schevenigen. She dedicates three paragraphs to the relationship she claims to have fostered with an ant in her cell:

> into my solitary cell came a small busy black ant. […] I apologized for my size and promised I would not so thoughtlessly stride about again. […] when my evening piece of bread appeared […] I scattered some crumbs and to my joy he popped out […] It was the beginning of our relationship. […] I had the company of this brave and handsome guest – in fact soon of a whole small committee. If I was washing out clothes […] when the ants appeared, I stopped at once and gave them my full attention.[58]

This passage is illuminating, and highlights the relative privilege Ten Boom had during confinement (many Jewish women were not kept in isolation at all, and were too hungry to consider sharing food with anyone). Her focus on a partnership with a non-human actor based in respect and mutuality, and even sharing, allows her to frame herself as an

[56] Ibid., p. 188.
[57] Ibid., p. 195.
[58] Ibid., p. 144.

incorruptible, moral survivor. Her personification and gendering of the ant, whom she describes as a 'brave and handsome guest,' highlights her persistence in maintaining respectful and harmonious ecological relationships. In her retelling of this event, at least, Ten Boom rejects the role of subordinator or subordinated for an ethic of caretaking and partnership, resisting the dehumanising forces of her oppressors. Moreover, this narrative sees Ten Boom structure her post-Holocaust identity around, and credit her resistance and survival with, the maintenance of typically feminine, and even essentialised, notions of gender.

This is mirrored in the 1998 testimony of Geneviève de Gaulle Anthonioz, a French Christian resistance worker. She was arrested in 1943 and held in Fresnes prison near Paris, before being deported to Ravensbrück in February 1944. She spent much of her time in the camp in solitary confinement in a prison bunker. Like Ten Boom, de Gaulle Anthonioz writes of a relationship developed with insects in her cell. She recalls:

> I organise races for the cockroaches. I place a minute piece of bread at the other end of the cell and they're off. Two champions emerge from the rest of the group. I can recognise them now: the bigger one is Victor, and the other I call Felix. They win by turns, more or less. A few crumbs console the stragglers. [59]

She later writes: 'I increase the bread ration given to my cockroaches. They have gradually become much tamer, and I surprise Felix nestling in the crook of my arm.'[60] De Gaulle Anthonioz's use of the verb 'nestling' here frames her as an instinctual nurturer and protector, her narrative return to normative female behaviours working as an indicator of her maintained humanity and gender conformity. This is further emphasised in the nurturance she claims to have bestowed on the insects, sharing with them her bread and naming them. In a final demonstration of her resistant and resilient nature, de Gaulle

[59] De Gaulle Anthonioz, *God Remained Outside*, p. 14.
[60] Ibid., pp. 22 – 23.

Anthonioz comparatively describes the treatment of the cockroaches by an SS warder, who comes to move her to a different cell: 'I take one last look at my dark quarters and my cockroaches, without any lingering regrets. The SS woman comes back and, catching sight of Felix close to me, she crushes him with an expression of disgust.'[61] What emerges, then, is an image of De Gaulle Anthonioz poles apart from her oppressors, intransigent in her unwillingness to give up her compassion.

III. The Assault of Vermin

Vermin such as rats and mice feature distinctively in women's memoirs. Unlike their parasitological and entomological counterparts, representations of which serve to bolster the authors' resilient self-image, the portrayal of vermin is largely used in earlier published memoirs comparatively: to emphasise the extent of the human suffering and lost self-determination of women prisoners in order that their adaptability can be underscored. Despite the fact that both Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, like Olga Lengyel, were incarcerated in the Auschwitz camp complex during the Holocaust, neither dedicate any space in their influential memoirs to prisoners' struggles with vermin. Yet in contrast, Lengyel writes of them at length and with notable hostility. In this passage she describes the deaths resulting from large-scale disinfections and delousing, which would leave many women exposed to the elements for extended periods of time. The rats of the camp, she explains, benefited from this:

> After each disinfection, the barracks were visibly less crowded. The corpses were laid out behind the barracks, to the great joy of the rats, who were surely the happiest occupants of Auschwitz-Birkenau. These rodents, fattening on the dead flesh of our unfortunate companions, were so much at home that nothing we could do would drive

[61] Ibid., p. 33.

> them from the barracks. They were not afraid of us. Quite the contrary. They may have felt that they were the real masters.[62]

In this rendering, the 'fattening' of the rodents serves to accentuate the shrinking of the prisoner population. More than that, Lengyel uses this image to emphasise Nazism's absolute power, able, even, to corrupt the natural world and create a perverse, topsy-turvy ecological hierarchy in which rats possessed mastery over the humans of the camp. Unlike in her portrayal of lice, in which Lengyel features as a worthy opponent, here the women are shown as powerless, able to do 'nothing' at all to combat the rats.

Gisella Perl's 1945 depiction of the vermin and wildlife of Auschwitz-Birkenau reinforces this notion of prisoner helplessness. In a passage dedicated to describing nature's cruelty in the camp, and particularly of the infirmary block in which she worked, Perl writes: 'The only animals we ever saw were crows, rats and lice, which shared our miserable life by stealing the crumbs out of our mouths, building their nests in our cages and crawling over our sleeping bodies at night.'[63] This passage functions in Perl's memoir on multiple levels. Most strikingly, the symbolic nature of the animals she chooses to list is of significance. While the crow is commonly thought to be symbolic of death and bad luck, rats and lice are widely representative of disease and filth. The precedence that these creatures take in her retelling, therefore, serves to stress the direness of her living situation, and work as a narrative tool deployed to reassert her victim status. Furthermore, Perl situates herself as powerless observer, as creature, trapped in a cage; in this narrativization, the animals evolve, personified as they take on homemaking and 'building,' or begin 'sharing' – practices often typically associated with traditional women's work – while the women themselves regress. Unlike the later narratives of De Gaulle Anthonioz and Ten Boom, which foreground the authors' maintenance of

[62] Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, p. 133.
[63] Perl, *I Was a Doctor*, p. 25.

caretaking capabilities and acceptable femininities, Perl's anthropomorphic portrayal of wildlife here sees the women defeminised and ultimately dehumanised, while the rats, by contrast, evolve.

Perl later claims that, just before her transferral from Auschwitz-Birkenau to Kattowitz, a smaller Auschwitz subcamp:

> The rats, our only companions, became bolder and bolder; they snuggled close to our bodies at night as if they wanted to borrow some of our remaining warmth. Sometimes a sudden movement frightened them, and they sank their sharp teeth into our flesh, which resulted in more typhus cases, more festering sores, more death sentences.[64]

The overriding tone of this passage is hostility. Much like the SS warders and guards of the camp, and much like the disease-spreading lice described by the other women, the rats are here shown to have determined the fate of the women prisoners. After all, a sudden movement, perhaps intended to resist their assault, claims Perl, could result in deadly cases of typhus. Perl's use of the term 'companions' and the description of the rats as 'snuggled close' to the prisoners' bodies, functions differently compared to the language deployed by De Gaulle Anthonioz and Ten Boom. In this instance, the tone of animosity underscoring the passage serves to emphasise not the women's reclamation of, or reliance upon, idealised narratives of gender, but the conflation of human and non-human in the camp setting. In this retelling, the companionship of the rats works as an indicator of the women's dehumanisation. This is all the more striking given that at no point in her memoir, one of the first of its kind to be produced, does Perl discuss human companionship between herself and other prisoners.

Others such as Charlotte Delbo and Seweryna Szmaglewska, whose memoirs were both produced within the first three decades following the war, similarly deploy the

[64] Ibid., p. 86.

language of brutality to illustrate their sense of defencelessness against Auschwitz-Birkenau vermin, and by extension their persecution and the disruption of ecological hierarchies. In one particularly macabre passage, Delbo remembers 'rats devouring lips still alive' in the charnel house of Auschwitz.[65] The helplessness of the women, their reduction not even to living, autonomous bodies, but merely to body parts, dominates this passage. Szmaglewska writes similarly:

> The rats are another reason for fear. They scurry from their holes and sewers as soon as night comes, and move silently about. They are huge and fat, fattened on the variety of nourishment that the camp can supply. It is known as fact that in Block 25 the rats chew the fingers off the corpses, gnaw at the faces – even attack the bodies of the dying. Emboldened by their power, they scurry ever closer to the patients. Sometimes from the lower bunks you can hear a sudden call: a rat! A rat! Fat and round, they quickly race away, leaving a long shadow behind them. There are so many of them that in feverish hallucination the patients see them as some huge army of bacteria of one of the diseases prevalent in the camp. All through the night, the scurrying, leaping and squeaking disturb your sleep. You cannot help remembering the rats in Block 25.[66]

In stark contrast with her portrayals of the women's battles with lice, Szmaglewska here centres the attack of the rats, as opposed to the women's responses to it. For the women of the Auschwitz-Birkenau infirmary, the rats, at least in this rendering, occupy their subconscious, reappearing in hallucinations and in memory as symbols of their oppression, and destined fate, under Nazism.

Nomberg-Przytyk too feels it important to allude to this in her memoir, claiming that in the infirmary of Auschwitz-Birkenau she was so frightened by the boldness of the rats that 'that night I dreamed yellow rats were chewing on my throat.'[67] Likewise, Krystyna Żywulska explains in her 1946 memoir that after watching rats devouring corpses outside of the hospital block of Camp B of Birkenau, in which her friend Zosha

[65] Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, p. 57.
[66] Szmaglewska, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, p. 59.
[67] Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz: True Tales*, p. 40.

was unwell with a fever, the rats invaded her dreams. She writes: '[o]ne thought persecuted me – if Zosha should die tonight, they would carry her out and rats would gnaw her eyes out. In my dreams that night, I saw rats crawling all over me, tearing, choking me, jumping at my eyes.'[68] Unlike the lice, equally guilty of spreading diseases such as typhus, the rats are described by Szmaglewska as 'another reason for fear' because, she suggests, of their ability to infiltrate the only element of themselves over which prisoners maintained autonomy: their imaginations. The rats central to these passages are framed as such fearsome spectres because, Szmaglewska implies, they reinforced the prisoners' victimhood.

Yet the spectre of the rat looms large in these representations not only to highlight the unspeakable horror of the camp setting, but to reinforce the authors' self-images as tenacious and adaptable survivors. Polish Jewish author Gena Turgel, for instance, writes in her 1987 memoir that the rats in the latrines of both Płaszów and Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps, to which she was deported in 1942 and 1944 respectively, were 'considered a minor inconvenience' by the women, and particularly by those whose job it was to clean the latrines daily. Similarly, describing an encounter with vermin in the infirmary of Birkenau, Nomberg-Przytyk remembers her initial reaction as one of fear:

> [s]uddenly, with fright, I saw a few huge rats coming close to the stove. They had yellow fur and long tails. I let out a terrible shriek. The rats were unimpressed. They behaved like domestic cats. "You'll get used to it," said one of the girls.[69]

Later in her testimony, when writing of the singing girls who worked on what she calls the *Leichenkommando*, 'whose job it was to load the dead into trucks,' Nomberg-Przytyk

[68] Żywulska, *I Came Back*, p. 76.
[69] Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz: True Tales*, p. 40.

marvels at their characters, wondering what kind of women they must be to endure such a job so seemingly cheerfully.[70] She describes a conversation between them:

> "How can you sing a merry song in front of those skeletons?" I called out resentfully. They looked at me in bewilderment, without the foggiest notion of what I was talking about.
> "You'll get used to it," one of them said. Then, after a moment's silence, she added: "If you don't get used to it you'll drop dead."
> I got used to it. After eight months in Auschwitz, I could look at the dead with indifference. […] I even got used to the rats warming themselves in front of the stove like cats. I had imbibed all the terrors of Auschwitz and lived.[71]

If the rats here function as a symbol of 'all the terrors of Auschwitz,' then Nomberg-Przytyk's claim to eventual indifference to them works to emphasise her resilience, her ability to acclimatise to unthinkable surroundings. This kind of flexibility and irrepressibility, she suggests, was necessary for survival. This sentiment is also evident in Perl's categorisation of the rats as 'companions' and Lengyel's claim to apathy – 'nothing we could do would drive them from the barracks,' she writes, without any implication that an effort was actually made to expel the rats – toward the vermin that feasted on the flesh of dead prisoners. What emerges is a paradoxical narrative of women at once testifying to the absoluteness of their oppression, conflated with and repressed by, even in their own retellings, camp vermin, yet so resilient in their adaptability that portrayals of vermin take on an air of mundanity.

Some women take a different approach to representations of vermin, writing of their struggles with rats in a manner that echoes their descriptions of battles waged between prisoners and lice, and that ultimately underscores their resistance to persecution and oppression. In her 1980 memoir of incarceration in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Płaszów and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps, for example, Polish Jewish survivor Bertha

[70] Ibid., p. 115.
[71] Ibid.

Ferderber-Salz, despite her claim that 'we never saw any animals in the camps,' frames the vermin as another weapon of oppression in the Nazi regime's armoury.[72] This is most apparent in her description of a rat encounter one winter's morning in Płaszów, as she and her niece Sabina were ordered to collect some water:

> Wrapped up and holding on to each other we walked along the snow-covered path. All of a sudden I noticed an animal pass us quickly. "Look, Sabina, a cat!" I called out to my niece, almost joyfully.
> "You're mistaken, aunt. It's an enormous rat!"
> "A rat as huge as that," I thought out loud, "must be in league with our persecutors. One murders us while the other gnaws at the flesh of our dead."[73]

In this portrayal the rats and the SS are companions in torture, and border in Ferderber-Salz's reimagining as almost interchangeable persecutors. This passage is all the more impactful when understood as a means by which the author creates a taxonomy of perpetrators, categorising them, both human and non-human, as parasitological, murderous creatures, in contrast to the purity and humanity of their victims. In doing so, Ferderber-Salz rejects the verminous comparisons made by the Nazis between Jews and rodents, reinforced in their propaganda drives, instead turning them upon her oppressors. Using this tactic she is able, in the retelling of experience, to humanise herself and dehumanise her persecutors. In the construction of her narrative, this in itself works to render Federber-Salz's identity as that of a resistant survivor.

Other women still, such as Ella Lingens-Reiner, who published her memoir just three years after the end of the war in 1948, claim to have resisted the attack of rats, though not with the same determination as they did the lice. Lingens-Reiner worked in one of Birkenau's hospital blocks owing to her studies in medicine. She writes that both rats and lice afflicted the camp's general population, and explains: 'Despite repeated

[72] Ferderber-Salz, *And the Sun*, p. 129.
[73] Ibid., pp. 129 – 130.

campaigns against vermin, it was never possible to get rid of the rats. I saw several women whose toes had been gnawed by rats while they were asleep, and I saw one whose nose had been bitten.'[74] Likewise, Rena Kornreich Gelissen remembers cold nights spent trying to sleep in her block of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the horror of sharing a bunk with a woman who had passed away in her sleep, attracting rats:

> There is something like ice touching my body. Recoiling, I struggle to return to the solace of sleep. I hate the rats that wander in between our bodies, chewing on whatever does not fight back. I jerk my feet; it is an automatic response to the varmints that cross our feet at night. Again I feel the pressure and push back against it. […] Involuntarily my hand reaches out to shove away the weight lying against me, then recoils, recognizing the touch of human flesh.[75]

Though both Lingens-Reiner and Kornreich Gelissen ultimately attest to the insensitivity of the rats, who, they claim, boldly feasted on both the living and the dead, each underscores their passage with an allusion to their own defiance of the vermin. While Kornreich Gelissen's hatred for the rats manifested itself, she claims, in an involuntary tick of the feet, maintained even in sleep, Lingens-Reiner alludes to organised, active attempts among the women to keep the rats away, despite the futility of this task.

What emerges from these passages are the varied ways in which these writers' portrayals of their relationships with verminous creatures function as narrative tropes through which they reinforce and construct self-image retrospectively. Many of those writing earlier, in the years immediately after liberation, centralise the intolerability of their living conditions in order to attest to their individual adaptability of character. Indeed, if rats as bed fellows and house mates takes on an air of banality in narrative, then the ability of the authors to acclimatise to, and survive, horrific surroundings is made evident. It is not surprising, given the time of publication of their memoirs, that these

[74] Lingens-Reiner, *Prisoners of Fear*, p. 43.
[75] Konreich Gelissen, *Rena's Promise*, p. 126.

authors focus largely on their own skills of acclimatisation, rather than evoking their struggles with non-human actors as unifying, nurturing experiences. Those who published their memoirs later, such as Kornreich Gelissen and Ferderber-Salz, emphasise their detestation of vermin, and by extension their captors, more explicitly. In these renderings, much like those of women prisoners' active resistance against lice, and particularly those writing in the 1990s, the overriding image created is that of resistant, resilient survivors.

IV. The Natural Landscape, the Climate and the Weather

A common observation made by contemporary visitors of former Nazi forced labour and concentration camps, and particularly Auschwitz I and Auschwitz-Birkenau, is that no birds fly over the sites and none can be heard singing. Some even go as far as to claim that on the grounds of Auschwitz, 'nothing lives. The silence is total. No birds or animals, nothing growing, no break in the endless grey.'[76] These claims are a misconception, and function only as a dramatized trope in popular Holocaust imagination that allows sites of atrocity to take on mythical proportions. Robert van Pelt discusses this in his 2003 article, 'Of Shells and Shadows: A Memoir of Auschwitz.' He argues that Auschwitz, both as an individual site and, being the most visited Holocaust site in existence, as representative of all sites of Nazi atrocity, has 'become a myth.'[77] In a time described by philosophers as 'an age "after Auschwitz,"' he claims, many pronounce 'Auschwitz to be an unthinkable realm shrouded in silence […] an unintelligible world, a strange universe,

[76] 'Nothing lives – no birds, no animals. The silence is total', *Wirral Globe* (January, 2008) <https://www.wirralglobe.co.uk/news/1973959.nothing-lives-no-birds-no-animals-the-silence-is-total/> [accessed 21/01/2019]
[77] Robert van Pelt, 'Of Shells and Shadows: A Memoir of Auschwitz', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13 (2003), 377 – 392 (p. 277).

that cannot be explained.'[78] In their discussion of the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger write comparably, contending that the Holocaust is 'a hole into which the third generation, with painstakingly unswerving descent, will fall,' particularly as that 'history can only be imaginatively reconstructed from an approximation of that time and place, events excavated from the "shards" of memories.'[79] Certainly, many tourists and (1st, 2nd and 3rd generation) survivors alike, recognise that, contemporarily, Holocaust sites have come to represent an absence; not only an absence of all life but – for those who did not live it – an absence of understanding of the Holocaust gained through first-hand experience. In van Pelt's words, 'present-day mythification […], in the words of survivor David Rousset,' understands 'the concentration camp world as a "dead planet laden with corpses."'[80]

This mythification process which, particularly in the twenty-first century, has seen Holocaust sites transformed into barren worlds, and thus, in Andrea Simon's words, has seen the Holocaust itself in popular consciousness distorted into 'one big empty hole,' is at odds with both the fundamental reality – extant sites of Nazi internment such as Auschwitz I and Birkenau are, in the present day and particularly in the summer months, teeming with wildlife and greenery – and the recollections of many survivors.[81] In the literal sense, survivors returning post-Holocaust to the sites of their incarcerations debunk this myth. Edith Eger observed on her return to Auschwitz in 1980 that in fact, 'the grass is lush. The trees have filled in.'[82] Numerous survivors also show a persistent preoccupation in their narratives with representing the natural and environmental

[78] Ibid.
[79] Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representations: Trauma, History, and Memory* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2017), p. 4.
[80] Van Pelt, 'Of Shells and Shadows', p. 377; David Rousset, *The Other Kingdom*, trans. by Ramon Guthrie (New York, 1947), pp. 168 – 169, cited in van Belt, 'Of Shells and Shadows', p. 377.
[81] Andrea Simon, *Bashert: A Granddaughter's Holocaust Quest* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), p. 38.
[82] Eger, *The Choice*, p. 301.

elements of their incarcerations. Arguably, the popular post-Holocaust association between sites of Nazi atrocity and barrenness, however, have provoked survivors like Helen Lewis in her 1992 memoir, to depict their incarcerations as taking place on landscapes of desolation. Writing of Auschwitz-Birkenau, in which she was imprisoned in 1944, she explains: 'here nature had died, alongside the people. The birds had flown from the all-pervading black smoke of the crematoria and their departure had left a silence that was like a scream.'[83] Yet she, like many other women memoirists, goes on to describe the weather and the natural landscape in great detail. These contradictions, particularly in testimonies published decades after liberation, such as that of Eger, are indicative of the ways that global Holocaust remembrance has shifted since the event, and how such alterations, the development of the 'myth' of Auschwitz as barren, have impacted the retelling of experience for many women survivors.

While the confines of Nazi internment centres were often grey and, at least in appearance, lifeless, many were surrounded by a flourishing and beautiful landscape visible, on occasion, to prisoners from within camp complexes or when labouring on a work detail outside of camp grounds. Ravensbrück, roughly an hour north of Berlin, was built in the Mecklenburg Lake District and was surrounded by picturesque forests.[84] Auschwitz I was founded in 1940 and located in southern Poland on the outskirts of Oświęcim, a small industrial town, while Auschwitz-Birkenau, roughly three kilometres from Auschwitz I, though built on marshland, was situated close to woodland and a grove of birch trees, from which the camp took its name. Dachau, meanwhile, which had a number of subcamps, was located in southern Germany, and had a large garden and agricultural complex on its west side. Outwith the landscape, both survivors and

[83] Lewis, *A Time to Speak*, p. 64.
[84] Helm, *If This is a Woman*, p. xi – 3.

historians note that the weather and the climate during survivor incarcerations not only impacted prisoners' ability to cope – pleasant weather in the spring in Auschwitz, for example, made standing outside for roll call or work more bearable – but could be the difference between life and death. Tim Cole, for instance, points out that the Polish winter of 1944-45 was a particularly harsh one that saw Auschwitz prisoners struggle through, and die as a result of, snow, ice and sub-zero temperatures, both within the camp and on evacuation marches in January 1945.[85] Frost bite and hypothermia in freezing temperatures could prove fatal. In the summer months in the Auschwitz camp complex, however, heatstroke, dehydration and sunburn threatened the lives of prisoners on outside work assignments with inadequate clothing. More than that, prisoners' barracks were often poorly constructed, overcrowded and underheated. In Birkenau in particular, which was built on soggy marshland, prisoners struggled to survive in primitive living quarters that lacked heating or paved floors.

Unsurprisingly, many women who spent time during the Holocaust incarcerated in these institutions dedicate considerable space to representing the natural environment, the weather and the elements in their memoirs. They pay particular attention to the hope and life-giving forces of the existence of the natural landscape beyond the barbed wire fences of their respective camps, but tend to write with hostility about the elemental and environmental forces within the camps, perpetuating, to some degree, the 'myth' of Auschwitz as barren. In her narrativization of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Seweryna Szmaglewska uses representations of the landscape beyond the camp as a means to illustrate her maintained humanity. As noted by Tim Cole, many survivors in their testimonies attest to the fact that outside work assignments, both within and without the Auschwitz camp complex, were often avoided by prisoners when possible, for usually

[85] Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes*, p. 174.

they resulted in exposure to weather conditions that could prove fatal. Cole writes that '[o]ne open secret that runs through many survivors' narratives is that the greatest improvement to camp life was in getting an inside, rather than an outside, job. […] Survival boiled down to spatial strategies.'[86] While his observation about survivor accounts is generally accurate, Szmaglewska defies this pattern in her rendering.

She explains, after writing of the hardship of those condemned to work on train track construction:

> But the group that everyone envies is at work in the woods. It is difficult to manage to be that part of the large column which stays at the end and goes into the woods. The forest! Yearning for its soothing silence after the dreadful unceasing hubbub of the camp – yearning for but a moment to be alone, when in the camp you are never alone, in any situation, be it day or night – yearning for the creaking of branches swaying in the wind, for the low whistle of the yellow thrush, the bird of woodland solitude – many women quickly learn to maneuver into a place in the column which will surely and without fail take them to the forest.[87]

In this retelling, the landscape features as a mark of Szmaglewska's character on multiple levels. In the first instance, the author's irrepressible self-image is here upheld in her depiction of a maintained, or revived, appreciation for the natural world. More than that, Szmaglewska chooses to focus on the preservation of hope and the will to survive through solitude, not human companionship. Here it is individualism, as opposed to women's mutual aid or an ethic of caretaking, that arises through the author's narrative lens of environmental appreciation. For Szmaglewska, at least in the narrativization of events, the risk of exposure to the elements is trumped by the life-giving capabilities of the forest; survival is depicted as reliant on a reconnection with self and surroundings, rather than on precautions taken against weather-induced ill health.

[86] Ibid., p. 83.
[87] Szmaglewska, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, pp. 28 – 29.

Comparable threads run through the memoirs of other women who published in the immediate post-war years; threads that humanise the authors, accentuating their individual strength of character and irrepressibility of imagination, rather than approach the natural environment from a perspective of human connection. Krystyna Żywulska frames her experiences with the natural environment as an imaginative aid through which her connection to normalcy is bolstered in retelling. She, like Szmaglewska, writes of the delights of an external work detail outside of the Birkenau grounds in which she claims she was ordered to cut osier rods for baskets at the banks of the Sola river in the summer months. This opportunity, and the luck of receiving a lenient supervisor, gave her the chance, she claims, to lie in the sun, hidden by thick brush, and imagine she was 'lying on a beach, dressed in a bathing suit instead of that awful rough prison dress. I imagined that I had long, flowing hair instead of that rough brush.'[88] 'Nothing mattered,' she writes, 'I was dreaming anyway.'[89] Later in her memoir, Żywulska remembers that towards the end of her incarceration as 'the Third Reich was crumbling,' '[o]ne memorable day' her supervisor, Janda, took herself, Nella and Ada outside of the camp grounds on a mushroom picking expedition.[90] She writes:

> We shouted with joy. We could not believe in our luck. […]
> The earth was damp, the sky a pale blue. We entered a crystal clear atmosphere. The nauseating, musty smell of corpses disappeared, the shouts from Canada died away. Our step was light and free. Our feet caressed this free plot of land. We entered the woods. No one disturbed the quiet. […] I sat on a log. […]
> I did not want this moment to end. I took some earth between my fingers – clean earth unstained by human blood. The sand flowed through my fingers.
> Janda was observing me. My enemy was looking at me. I suddenly thought, 'If I could only get hold of her revolver. I could shoot her and the dog and take that road through the forest and across the field and then? It would not matter. That one moment would be worth it.'[91]

[88] Żywulska, *I Came Back*, p. 45.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., p. 209; Ibid., p. 216.
[91] Ibid., p. 216.

For Żywulska, these portrayals of the natural environment outside of the camp's grounds function as a means by which the reader is reminded of the maintained liberatory power of the author's imagination. Żywulska depicts herself, while laying by the river, as having embraced the reminder of times of normality, of a time in which her body felt feminine in a bathing suit. In the description of the mushroom picking assignment, on the other hand, the power of imagination, inspired by the serenity of her peaceful surroundings, allows her apparent defiant tendencies – she claims to have dreamt of shooting her supervisor and marching to freedom – to come to the fore of her narrative. More than anything, these passages allow Żywulska, in the construction of her account, to self-define, to reinforce a self-image structured upon intellectual, if not physical, autonomy.

Others write concurrently about the weather, the climate and the landscape of Auschwitz-Birkenau and its surroundings, emphasising an instinctual and humanising connection with the natural world. In 'Lili Marlene,' the first story of her testimony, Liana Millu describes working in an Auschwitz-Birkenau *Kommando* tasked with filling tram cars with sand; it was heavy and tiring work, and it was a cold day. Despite this, however, she feels it important to note that:

> The early morning mist had vanished and the pale sun cast weak rays, but no warmth, on the countryside. And yet despite the pallor of the light, everything suddenly looked different: the fields stood out luminously, tinged with the last green of autumn and the bright red bricks of a half-built house. It definitely wouldn't rain today, and this, in our misery, was the greatest of all possible blessings.[92]

Milu's understanding of the landscape and the natural world, she implies, was such that even the paleness of the morning sky could renew hope. Likewise, in her 1946 memoir, Giuliana Tedeschi's depiction of her primitive bond with the earth of Birkenau underscores not only an ethic of partnership, but one of mutuality. She describes her

[92] Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, pp. 21 – 22.

observation of the landscape, made, she claims, while on an external work assignment tasked with steering carts and their contents to pits:

> often the sky was dense with huge gray and white clouds. Blown by the wind, they hurried on their way like wild horses. That was Poland! The rain would begin to fall, unrelenting, sometimes irksomely thin and penetrating, sometimes tumbling in heavy showers. Why was God taking it out on us too? […] When the sky is gray, the huts are gray, the roads are gray, and you yourself feel you are being absorbed more and more into the environment, there is nothing in the outside world that reaches you or brings a ray of warmth.[93]

Yet contrastingly, she also explains:

> When the sky was blue, if you half-closed your eyes and intensified the colors, enriched the land's fertility with nostalgia and imagination, then you could see Italy. At moments like this […] we would try to get close to the earth: we'd lie down, heads resting on grassy soil, and enjoy losing ourselves in its living embrace.[94]

The relationship with nature here portrayed by Tedeschi is a complex one. Her claim that she felt increasingly 'absorbed' into the environment, that the two almost became one – she was grey, she claims, when the environment was grey, heartened when it was bright – suggests an ecological relationship built upon respect and compassion. This is somewhat unusual given the early publication date of Tedeschi's testimony, and sees her retrospectively underpin her self-image with allusions to traditionally feminine ethics, much like Ten Boom and de Gaulle Anthonioz do in their portrayals of insects. This is underscored by her description of the earth as a 'living' entity, personified by her claim that it was able to 'embrace' her as a friend or lover might do. In her retelling then, Tedeschi's claim to humanity, her process of self-identification, is bolstered by a narrative of reciprocal ecological relationships – just as the land embraces her, she embraces the

[93] Tedeschi, *There is a Place*, pp. 35 – 36.
[94] Ibid., p. 35.

land – and essentialised notions of gender. Tedeschi appears to recognise in the landscape, much like Seweryna Szmaglewska does when she writes that in Birkenau '[t]he sky talks,' and that the powerful 'call of the earth' was 'awakened by the spring,' a certain humanity mirrored by her own.[95]

In contrast, and anticipating – or, for those publishing decades after the event, writing in response to – the development of the 'myth' of Auschwitz as barren and desolate, as Robert van Pelt terms it, many other Jewish women write of the internal landscapes of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz-Birkenau, and even the weather within their confines, as a further means of oppression which the women prisoners were forced, through adaptability and strength of character, to overcome. Kitty Hart-Moxon notes, for example, that in Auschwitz-Birkenau extra layers of clothing were crucial in cold Polish winters, but difficult to come by: '[w]inter could be fatal unless you organized extra clothing.'[96] Interestingly, Hart-Moxon frames the procurement of extra garments as 'organizing,' which is suggestive not only of her own ingenuity, but of swapping clothes for food rations or taking clothes from Canada, an act that would not disadvantage other inmates. Yet the organisation of sought-after items, many memoirists explain, often also meant stealing garments from other prisoners. This aspect of camp organisation is more candidly written about by men in their testimonies, and is often framed as the ceaseless war of everyone against everyone (though as explained in Chapter 2, this is also written about by women survivors). Hart-Moxon's implication is, however, that she procured garments to shield her from the elements through considerate and inventive means.

Seweryna Szmaglewska and Gisella Perl, on the other hand, fortify their descriptions of the weather within the confines of Birkenau, and particularly in the

[95] Smaglewska, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, p. 312; Ibid., p. 152.
[96] Hart-Moxon, *Return to Auschwitz*, p. 118.

summer months, with a violent and even murderous subtext. This not only serves to reinforce their sense of victimisation, but to symbolise their resistance of oppression. Szmaglewska, for instance, writes that winter months in the camp were something that 'the women feared the most (and many rightly so, for they will not greet this spring).'[97] Perl asserts the strength of her feelings of animosity toward the 1944-45 winter, explaining '[n]o human being has ever hated snow and ice with more concentrated violence than we did during that January.'[98] She goes on:

> The first days of January 1945 were the coldest yet experienced in Auschwitz. Snow and ice covered the narrow streets between the barracks. Our feet froze to the ground during roll call, and those who had succeeded in retaining their health to a certain degree until now, came down with serious frostbite on their feet, hands, ears, noses. The warm tears of pain turned into shiny pearls of ice by the time they reached our cheeks and our lashes stood out stiff like so many tiny icicles.[99]

What emerges here is not only a reminder of the women's powerlessness and sense of assault against the brutality of the Polish climate, but an allusion to the resilience of the women forced to suffer it. Perl's particularly literary description of 'tears of pain' that 'turned to shiny pearls of ice' is striking, and implies that, much like their tears, the women's steely resolve to survive endured, even as their persecution became more unbearable in the winter months.

Moreover, in framing the weather and the climate as in league with their persecutors, as comparably threatening, some Jewish memoirists position themselves as antithetical to that cruelty in their accounts. Indeed, if the climate and the SS are teammates in persecution, both inhuman in their lack of empathy, then by definition the women appear in antithesis, as compassionate victims. Kitty Hart-Moxon, for instance, classifies the weather of Auschwitz-Birkenau as 'biting cold' in winter, while Rena

[97] Szmaglewska, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, p. 115.
[98] Perl, *I was a Doctor*, p. 86.
[99] Ibid., p. 85.

Kornreich Gelissen explains that while hanging the wet uniforms of SS soldiers out to dry (a work assignment she was given in Birkenau) 'the cold nearly bites our hands off,' and she later notes that the cold wind was 'cruel.'[100] Likewise, Fania Fénelon represents the environment as almost consciously brutal in her 1976 memoir. Describing a day not long after her arrival in camp when she claims to have been taken out of Camp A and into Camp B to sing Madame Butterfly to audition for the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz, Fénelon writes:

> The vicious cold bit at my ears. […] I sank into the icy snow where the mud sucked at my shoes and held them firm. […] I mislaid a shoe, lodged in the snow. Too bad, I threw off the other too and ran barefoot, a thousand needles of ice piercing my feet.[101]

Here, Fénelon's strength of character is not only emphasised by her insistence that she threw away her other shoe in order to better keep up with the Polish warder leading her, despite the assault of the snow, but in her description of the functionary who, by contrast, 'wasn't cold, with her warm coat, boots, and head scarf.'[102] Judith Magyar Isaacson, a Hungarian Jew deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with her mother in July 1944, goes as far as to describe the cold winter weather as aggressively persecutory in her 1990 testimony. She was housed for much of her internment in barracks BIII of Birkenau, known to inmates as 'Mexico' because it was unfinished and, to cite the author, 'the poorest of the poor.'[103] She recalls that at one predawn roll call three weeks into her incarceration: '[a]n icy rain lashed viciously in the dark, and it chased mother, Magda,

[100] Hart-Moxon, *Return to Auschwitz*, p. 118; Kornreich Gelissen, *Rena's Promise*, p. 204; Ibid., p. 90.
[101] Fénelon, *Playing for Time*, p. 25.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Judith Magyar Isaacson, *Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of a Survivor* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 68.

and me from the edge of the phalanx; the more the *kapos* lashed, the more everyone shoved toward the center.'[104]

These portrayals show, in a manner akin to many women's depictions of hostile relationships with vermin and parasites, the authors' conflation of the pitilessness of the SS and that of the climate and weather. While the vicious lash of the rain recalls the whip lashes of the *kapos* and SS guards punishing prisoners for minor infractions, the biting cold harks back to well-worn and recurrent testimonial images of trained SS dogs tearing into the flesh of those incarcerated. In these retellings then, images of the elemental forces experienced by those within the Auschwitz camp complex, serve, in their cruelty, to emphasise the persecution felt by survivors. More than that, in these reconstructions the natural environment becomes the arbiter of the women's concentration camp existence, while their own power, their own sense of selves as autonomous beings, diminishes. Nonetheless, by associating, or conflating, the climate and the weather with their persecutors, these memoirists succeed in framing themselves in antithesis to their oppressors, as maintaining stoicism, the will to survive, and a sense of humanity in a setting explicitly designed to destroy those very characteristics.

V. Conclusion

Nazi internment centres in occupied Europe, among them concentration and forced labour camps, and even prison cells and bunkers, disrupted biopolitical order and popular hierarchical notions of natural world order. In so doing, they upset both Jewish and non-Jewish, and particularly female, placement within these structures. As such, these institutions disturbed, for many survivors, concepts of personal identity. The published

[104] Ibid., p. 76.

testimonies here studied illustrate that women's retrospective responses to these experiences are not uniform, and cannot be understood as homogenous. Not only do personal aspects such as religion, nationality, as well as the reason for and place of imprisonment, and the position during incarceration in the Holocaust, impact the way they narrativize their experiences, but so too do gender, Holocaust historiography, the literary canon of women's testimonial writings, and other cultural, political and social factors.

An examination of these diverse responses informed by feminist ecocriticism, and offering an 'emancipatory alternative' to reductive ecofeminist approaches to literature, allows us to observe their heterogeneity and avoid essentialist thinking. What is revealed using this approach is an insight into how these women use an ecological framework to retrospectively shape their experiences and construct their own identities as resistant, resilient, adaptable and ultimately acceptable survivors. While writing of her time working in the Auschwitz-Birkenau hospital block, Olga Lengyel emphasises the divide between herself and the natural world, deploying the language of war as a humanising trope. Since, in her retelling, the relationship between herself and the lice remains hostile, and since her fighting spirit endures, she is able to sustain a resilient self-image. Other testimonies describe with surprising frankness the ferocity, and even glee, with which some women claim to have dealt with parasite infestations. Seweryna Szmaglewska, Charlotte Delbo and Rena Kornreich Gelissen document how mercilessly crushing the lice would leave their hands and nails stained with their own blood and that of their companions. This image of violence signals not only a reclaiming of agency, but a reclaiming of self in the process of retelling.

Other women use an ecological framework to underscore their own maintenance of dignity, humanity, and decency, retrospectively structuring their identities around

conformance to traditional gendered norms and expectations. For Ruth Elias this comes in the form of descriptions of washing in the family camp of Birkenau, and in the ironing of clothes in Taucha labour camp. For other women, such as Sara Tuvel Bernstein in her portrayals of Ravensbrück, or Seweryna Szmaglewska in her narrative of the Birkenau hospital block, delousing becomes an act of nurturance, a social phenomenon through which prisoners could foster meaningful human connections and care for one another. The women's united front against the lice, and in turn their oppressors and their victimisation, dominates these passages. For the more privileged Christian survivors, an ethic of partnership, caretaking and reciprocity endures, encompassing not only their human counterparts but their non-human ones too. This serves to imbue their narratives with a sense of self premised upon compassion, respect, and dignity, allowing them to frame themselves, in Erica Bouris's words, as maintaining ideal victim qualities such as 'innocence, purity, moral superiority, and a lack of responsibility.'[105]

When depicting their experiences with vermin and even the climate and the weather during imprisonment, many Jewish women writing in the immediate post-war years, such as Gisella Perl, use an ecological framework to attest not only to the direness of their living conditions during the Holocaust, but to their own formidable abilities to adapt to unthinkable circumstances. Others, like Bertha Ferderber-Salz, narrativize their experiences through the lens of verminous relationships to define themselves, physically and morally speaking, in antithesis to their oppressors. Others still, deploy environmental and elemental tropes to bolster self-images of strength and resistance, to reinforce, like Żywulska, a sense of maintained intellectual and imaginative autonomy. Tedeschi, on the other hand, much like de Gaulle Anthonioz and Ten Boom, relies in her retelling upon a recurrent image of mutuality and reciprocity, both with the human and environmental

[105] Bouris, *Complex Political Victims*, p. 48.

actors by which she was surrounded. As such, what emerges from these accounts are varied narratives of self and experience centred upon self-determination, upon self-identification underpinned with threads of adaptability and resilience, respect and compassion, stoicism and fortitude.

Internment during the Holocaust presented a representational challenge for those writing their testimonies after the event. In different ways, portrayals of non-human actors and the natural world serve as actants in these women's accounts both to help them represent the terrors of experience and to maintain their identities as survivors, women, and human beings. Zoë Waxman argues that the act of producing a testimony within a culture that values traditional gender roles often involves the reclaiming of an identity.[106] It is my position that these women's complex accounts of their experiences of internment are centred upon rediscovering or maintaining an acceptable – and often gendered – sense of self; upon making a sustained (and likely subconscious) effort, even in retelling, to defy the stereotypes and oppressive forces imposed on them by their persecutors. As can be seen, this manifests itself in their use of both hostile and respectful ecological relationships as an overarching explanatory trope for constructing their own post-Holocaust identities.

A shift in analytic focus that draws on feminist ecocriticism reveals that a preoccupation with the natural world underscores women's testimonial writings, and that nature is, in fact, just one important trope that plays a significant role in retelling. Writings about the natural world and the Holocaust allow us to garner a more thorough understanding of the diverse ways in which, for women, the construction of post-Holocaust narrative is interwoven with the construction of post-Holocaust identity. Shining a light on how non-human actors are represented by survivors helps us identify

[106] Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, p. 150.

the ways they understand the dehumanisation, suffering, and oppression they experienced, the manner in which they use narration to structure their self-image, and the role that gender plays in retelling.

5

Conclusion

The Holocaust constituted the persecution and mass murder of European Jewry, as well as the oppression and murder of other victim groups, among them ethnic Poles and Slavs, homosexuals, Roma and Sinti gypsies, the disabled, Nazi political opponents and resistance members, and German criminals and prostitutes. Under the Nazi regime, Europe's Jews were persecuted specifically *as* Jews, and irrespective of gender, sexuality, age, social class or nationality, it was intended that all would share the fate of death. To cite Lenore Weitzman and Dalia Ofer, 'Nazi policy targeted all Jews as Jews, and the primary status of Jew was their "race," not their gender.'[1] Yet while the Holocaust's assault of its Jewish victims was indiscriminate, it was not gender neutral.

Jewish men and women not only experienced and responded to the Holocaust in different (and some comparable) ways, but were treated differently to one another. At arrival to concentration camps such as Auschwitz, for instance, biology could determine immediate condemnation to death or life within the camp, even if that survival was brief. Biology-related issues such as amenorrhea, menstruation, childbirth, infanticide, abortion, sexual humiliation during camp initiation processes, and the threat and reality of sexual violence and rape (experienced by some men too, though little documented), also shaped the internment experiences of the Holocaust's women victims. What is more, gender – both assumptions about and idealisations of certain expressions of gender and expectations of gendered conduct – has influenced the manner in which Holocaust

[1] Ofer and Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*, p. 2.

experiences are retrospectively narrativized for a public readership; published accounts of the Holocaust are inevitably gendered.

Despite this, traditional Holocaust scholarship has, at least until recent years, been reluctant to use gender as a category of analysis with which to approach either the study of the event or its resultant corpus of survivor literature. Generally speaking, male-dominated historiography has had a tendency to favour male Jewish experience of the Holocaust as normative or universal, leaving women's, and indeed, men's particular gendered experiences and retellings largely unexamined. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, feminist historians began to explicitly dedicate scholarship to women and the Holocaust, aiming to explore how historical research informed by gender and feminist theory could allow us to gain a more representative understanding of the Holocaust as a whole. Yet not only have these studies had relatively little impact on Holocaust studies and wider Holocaust discourses, but much of this well-intentioned scholarship was unwittingly guilty of reinforcing dualistic discourses and essentialist thinking.

Consequently, historiography – and even feminist historiography – on women and the Holocaust, underpinned by scholars' assumptions about gender, often reduced women's experiences and accounts to views fundamentally centred upon traditionally feminine roles and values, such as nurturance, mothering, caretaking, and sharing. These established views and stereotypes continue to endure even today, in spite of the efforts of some contemporary feminist historians working to dismantle such assumptions propagated by outdated scholarship. A conference entitled 'Heroines of the Holocaust: Frameworks of Resistance,' for example, due to be held at Wagner College, Staten Island, in June 2021, asks for research papers that explore 'resilient bonds: mother/sister/aunt/daughter/grandmother'; my own paper, which was based on the final chapter of this thesis and which ultimately worked to deconstruct the well-worn women-

as-heroines paradigm, was rejected by the conference organisers. Yet a scholarly unwillingness to acknowledge the insights gained from the gendered study of the Holocaust and to move beyond schematic dualisms and heroising discourses, not only overlooks women's distinctive and complex experiences – and narrativizations of experience – *as* women, but those of men *as* men. This reluctance also creates a form of scholarly gatekeeping by which non-traditional narratives and new, gendered insights are excluded from contemporary Holocaust discourses. The result is an understanding of the Holocaust that is ultimately incomplete, overly simplified and outdated.

Far from being easy to categorise, the respective published accounts of male and female survivors that were produced for public consumption are nuanced and often carefully crafted literary reconstructions of events. They are informed by preconceived notions of gender, social, as well as political and cultural factors, Holocaust remembrance and historiography, their respective time, place and original language of publication, the intersectional elements – such as gender, age, nationality, and sexuality – of the authors' personal backgrounds, and even the canon of survivor literature itself. More than that, the memoirs of Holocaust survivors are diverse and heterogenous, published in an array of decades for varying audiences, and chronicle multifaceted experiences of different types of incarceration and Nazi institutions; as such, they cannot and should not be homogenised or essentialised. In light of this, a gendered approach – one that questions how gender functions historically – to critical reading becomes all the more crucial. So too does a methodological practice, such as that deployed throughout this thesis, that works at the interface between history and literary studies, combining rigorous, context-driven historical research with critical close reading. I have worked to illustrate that such an interdisciplinary, gender-centric approach can create space for new insights of significance to be discovered in Holocaust accounts, and to encourage both mainstream

and feminist Holocaust scholarship to embrace testimonial study that incorporates fresh and unorthodox perspectives.

This thesis has argued for and modelled an 'against-the-grain' rereading of women's published, English-language memoirs of the Holocaust that can furnish us with a more profound understanding of them. In the first instance, in Chapter 1 and throughout, it has aimed to show that women's – and indeed, all – memoirs cannot be divorced from the testimonial landscapes they inhabit, and interact with the time period within which they were produced. To understand their chronological development and the testimonial discursive frameworks by which they are informed, is to more fully understand the representations of the Holocaust within them. Secondly, using queer, gender and feminist theory as hermeneutic tools of critical reading, this thesis has challenged traditional – androcentric, essentialist, heterosexist and normative – approaches to women's Holocaust accounts, shedding light upon the representations, construction of identity and gendered narratives within them. In its context-led examination of depictions of egocentrism and hostility, queer sexualities, and Holocaust ecologies in women's testimonies, topics which have not only remained largely unacknowledged by scholarship, but have often – for various reasons – gone consciously undeclared in published accounts, this thesis has sought to nuance and revise our scholarly approach to survivor literature. I have argued that methodological approaches that do not advance our understanding of the Holocaust beyond well-worn tropes risk restricting progress in the field.

This inference may seem shocking and perhaps even inapposite. For it might be (and indeed has been) asserted that gendered and unconventional, oppositional reading has the potential to trivialise the unmitigated horror of the accounts. Alternatively, it may be – and indeed has been – contended, to repeat the words of David Cesarani cited in Chapter 3, that to focus on taboo elements of Holocaust testimonies, such as sexuality

and eroticism, 'may be in the worst possible taste.'[2] Likewise, themes such as violence and egocentrism, particularly in the narrativizations of women, will likely make for uncomfortable reading, while a study of ecological tropes in survivor literature could be challenged as callous to the suffering of the Holocaust's victims.

Yet as this thesis has worked to illustrate, these persistent motifs play an important role in women's retelling of Holocaust experiences and serve, in their unpicking, to illuminate how the authors yoke post-atrocity identity, gender expectations and portrayals of Holocaust experience. Though shining a light upon women's accounts in which Holocaust experiences are characterised as those of selfishness and alienation may prove somewhat unappealing, for instance, what emerges is a deeper understanding not only of the canon's true diversity, but of how such tropes function in the reinforcement of self-image for the authors. Similarly, while an examination of how queer sexualities feature materially and imaginatively in women's accounts may prove a disagreeable one to some readers and scholars, few concerns are more central to human experience than sexuality. Certainly, the degree to which sexual relationships are invoked in Holocaust memoirs is testament to their significance, at least in the retelling of experience, to many survivors. Finally, to conduct a study of ecologies and the natural world in women's memoirs is not to overlook the human, but to strengthen our understanding of retrospective human responses to suffering. To quote Ellen Stroud once again, such an approach can offer 'both new questions and new answers about our past.'[3]

These findings ultimately pose many more questions than they answer, and from them come lines of enquiry yet to be pursued. This thesis, after all, is built on the scholarship of contemporary feminist historians and literary critics, and cannot claim to

[2] Cesarani, *Final Solution*, p. xxxviii.
[3] Stroud, 'Does Nature Always Matter?', p. 80.

be the definitive word on oppositional and gender-led approaches to published – or indeed oral and unpublished – testimonies of the Holocaust. In this thesis I have proffered three models of 'against the grain' critical reading, three unorthodox approaches – grounded in queer, gender and feminist theory – to some much-read material, in the hopes not only of uncovering that which may have previously gone unseen, but of encouraging other scholars to approach historic sources creatively and to ask fresh questions. To cite Paula Hyman, 'several decades of social history have demonstrated that one can discover new sources by asking fresh questions of old material or by recognizing as historically significant experiences that were previously unseen even when documented.'[4] In these words Hyman wholly encapsulates the premise of and motivation for this thesis.

Yet even today there remains far more to be excavated in women's retellings of the Holocaust. Certainly, a gendered approach to all survivor accounts leaves much to be revealed. Scholarship on men's experiences and narrativizations *as* men, that on normative standards of masculinity and its significance both during the Holocaust and in its retelling, and of male Jewish intimacy, is still in its infancy. Scholarly attention is increasingly being turned toward these topics; important research is currently being conducted by Florian Zabranksy at the University of Sussex in this field, and a critical men's studies approach has been taken in studies of masculinity during the Holocaust, such as in Björn Krondorfer and Ovidiu Creangâ's 2020 edited collection and Maddy Carey's 2017 monograph. Ultimately, however, this field remains substantially understudied. Furthermore, there are inevitable limitations to this scholarship and its findings that leave gendered Holocaust research ripe for further study. Due to time constraints and its examination of how publication shapes portrayals of self, for instance,

[4] Paula E. Hyman, 'Feminist Studies and Modern Jewish History', in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, ed. By Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), (pp. 120 – 139) p. 132.

oral testimonies have not here been examined, nor have archival materials, memoirs of ghetto life or hiding, or documents produced inside Nazi internment centres. Large-scale comparative readings of these documents have the potential to illuminate the merits – or even pitfalls – of oppositional, gender-conscious reading.

As I stated in my introduction, this thesis began when my interest in Holocaust studies and women's history intersected, when I questioned, following the completion of my undergraduate degree, both why my knowledge of women's experiences of the Holocaust was so limited, and why their accounts of the event remained peripheral, even in university-level teaching on the topic. In my own struggle with androcentric and reductive Holocaust scholarship, I became concerned that the complexity of women's voices, the subtleties and ambiguities of their inferences, and the meaning in their silences were often going overlooked because of scholarly assumptions about gender and sexuality, and hierarchies of appropriateness and importance within academia. As such, I wished to uncover for myself what – if any – insights stood to be gained from my own non-traditional approach to critical reading. Over the course of my research I have discovered that women's accounts of internment under Nazism are varied and unique. I have found that by posing new questions of old material, by taking an oppositional stance to reading, we can garner a deeper and more profound understanding of Holocaust survivor literature.

If this thesis has a relevance today, both within academia and outwith it, then it is to say that heterosexism and expectations of gendered conduct are both oppressive and antiquated. In our daily lives, for those on their receiving end, they result at worst in persecution and maltreatment, at best in discomfort, silencing and fear. It is time for such notions and presuppositions to be relegated to the past, not only in wider society but in academia too. To do otherwise risks perpetuating scholarly misreading and reinforcing

historical blind spots. As this thesis has shown, when our approach to Holocaust testimonies is untethered by heterosexism, determinist cultural feminism, and assumptions about gender, when it is unmediated by the restrictions of traditional Holocaust research, we are able to glean so much more of value from the words – and the gaps between the words – of survivors. Only when we are truly willing to listen to the explicit and implicit voices of survivors, rather than using them to buttress our own expectations, will a representative and more extensive understanding of the Holocaust as retold by its survivors be realised.

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